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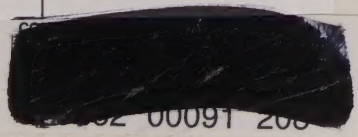

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SELECTIONS FROM POE'S LITERARY CRITICISM

UNIFORM WITH
THIS VOLUME

SELECTIONS FROM
JOHN MILTON

Edited by
MARTIN W. SAMPSON
Cornell University

SELECTED POEMS OF
ALEXANDER POPE

Edited by
LOUIS I. BREDVOLD
University of Michigan

SELECTIONS FROM POE'S LITERARY CRITICISM

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JOHN BROOKS MOORE

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F. S. Crofts & Co.
NEW YORK 1926

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INTRODUCTION

As soon as Fate allows I will have a magazine of my own, and will endeavor to kick up a dust.

—Poe to P. P. Cook, 1839.

I

That Poe was apparently first of all a journalist—neither a poet nor a writer of fiction—cannot well be doubted. Those of his contemporaries who knew him and left some record of their knowledge almost invariably owed their acquaintance with Poe to his journalistic activities of one sort or another. It is safest to say he was *apparently* first a journalist, for some of his biographers and students treat him as though he were primarily lover, or poet, or solitary dreamer. In examining the much-vexed treatments of Poe, it is necessary to proceed with some method. There are about Poe and his works books that may be called possible only, books that may be called probable, books that may be called actual. Woodberry's biography of Poe remains, after all psycho-analytical flurries, the *actual* book about Poe; while the heralded *Edgar Allan Poe* of J. W. Krutch wavers somewhere between the realms of the possible and the probable, for it begins with an hypothesis and concludes with the same hypothesis, the author (not the reader) having acquired astonishing certitude in the

course of his book about a highly undemonstrable pro
osition. Mr. Krutch looks for clues to Poe's nature
the poems and the tales for the most part. Here, he b
lieves, is the unconscious revelation of the sexual d
ficiencies or abnormalities that Poe would fain hav
concealed. Now, Poe's stories and poems do show n
merely a lack of, but an aversion to, physical passio
and it is easy to agree with a student who suspects se
ual peculiarities in Poe. The whole matter is at best i
genious speculation—never to be susceptible of proo
It would be almost as easy to build an account
Hawthorne—based upon his somber tales and nove
—as a specimen of sexual abnormality; it would be eas
if we did not know of Hawthorne's entirely whol
some marriage and family-life. One cannot be so a
dently sure of Poe's case as Mr. Krutch is.

On the other hand, a study of Poe's reviews an
other journalistic work affords plain, unhypothetic i
dications of his nature and his preoccupations—at lea
his conscious preoccupations if not his subconsciou
In a letter where there seems little reason to believ
that Poe could have been striking an attitude—as h
was prone to do in his public utterances—he formulate
his own "ultimate purpose."

> Holding steadily in view my ultimate purpose,—to found
> magazine of my own, or in which at least I might have
> proprietary right,—it has been my constant endeavor in th
> mean time, not so much to establish a reputation great in itse
> as one of that particular character which should best furthe
> my special objects, and draw attention to my exertions a
> editor of a magazine. . . .
>
> Setting aside, for the present, my criticisms, poems, an
> miscellanies (sufficiently numerous), my tales, a great numbe

f which might be termed fantasy pieces, are in number sixty-ix. They would make, perhaps, five of the ordinary novel olumes. I have them prepared in every respect for the press; ut, alas, I have no money, nor that influence which would nable me to get a publisher—although I seek *no* pecuniary emuneration. My sole immediate object is the furtherance f my ultimate one. I believe that if I could get my tales airly before the public, and thus have an opportunity of liciting foreign as well as native opinion respecting them, I hould by their means be in a far more advantageous position han at present in regard to the establishment of a magazine. n a word, I believe that the publication of the work would ead forthwith either directly through my own exertion, or in-irectly with the aid of a publisher, to the establishment of he journal I hold in view.

Poe did not only formulate his purpose but achieved a arge part of it with surprising vigor. He wished to ave a journal of his own—that is, to be himself both ditor and proprietor, and he proceeded with striking uccess to edit *The Southern Literary Messenger,* and hen *Graham's Magazine,* and then *The Broadway ournal.* He became proprietor as well as editor of *The Broadway Journal* but failed afterward to make a success, having probably little capacity as a busi-ess manager though great capacity as an editor. Poe vas a magazine editor. There his effort, his interests, nd his success lay. In the foregoing excerpt, it is o be noted that he regards his short stories as the eadiest means of gaining a reputation in the world of nagazines. He had thought out carefully the require-ents of magazine literature and found himself in gen-ral sympathy with these requirements. He tells what e has concluded about the matter in a paragraph later ublished in *Marginalia.*

The increase, within a few years, of the magazine lit
ature, is by no means to be regarded as indicating what se
critics would suppose it to indicate—a downward tendency
American taste or in American letters. It is but a sign of
times—an indication of an era in which men are forced up
the curt, the condensed, the well-digested—in place of
voluminous—in a word, upon journalism in lieu of disser
tion. We need now the light artillery rather than the Pea
makers of the intellect. I will not be sure that men at pr
ent think more profoundly than half a century ago, but
yond question they think with more rapidity, with more sk
with more tact, with more of method, and less of excrescen
in the thought. Besides all this, they have a vast increase
the thinking material. They have more facts, more to thi
about. For this reason, they are disposed to put the great
amount of thought in the smallest compass and disperse
with the utmost attainable rapidity. Hence the journali
of the age, hence, in especial, magazines. Too many we ca
not have, as a general proposition; but we demand that th
have sufficient merit to render them noticeable in the beginnin
and that they continue in existence sufficiently long to perm
us a fair estimation of their value.

Poe may have been reserved and somewhat lonely b
cause of his peculiar nature but he was certainly in t
thick of American letters of his day, not half so mu
the Dreamer (as a sentimental female biographer w
have him) as the extremely busy and unusually effe
tive journalist. Poe is not even that pathetic denatio
alized figure so dear to readers of his poems, the figu
so un-American, the figure somehow crippled by t
dreadful America in which it existed. There are
two ways about it;—Poe wanted to be an emine
"magazinist"; he labored diligently among a throng
fellows in the most populous region of North Americ
he almost realized his ambition of becoming a proprieto
editor.

To be sure, he also suffered poverty, was without in-
mate friends, continually ruined his most promising
pportunities by insane orgies of drunkenness. These
ings which throw a shadow over his professional suc-
sses can hardly be said to prove him un-American or
ssentially out of harmony with his environment. In
act, if we adopt the view of Poe as a surprisingly suc-
essful journalist, whose heart was in his magazine
ork, and as a man who perceived early, and sympa-
ized heartily with, the American desire for short,
wift magazine fiction and verse, then Poe emerges as
ne of the most American of the writers of his period.
nd Poe was American not only in his championship
f "the curt, the condensed" in literature but equally
his employment of the sensational (thus demonstrat-
g himself an instinctive journalist!) in his articles and
sclosures about hypnotism, mesmerism, and secret
phers.

In another way, unsuspected by readers who do not
now Poe's critical reviews, he shows himself a repre-
ntative American (representative of the minority of
e better reviewers). He never loses an opportunity
deride the subservience of American criticism to
ntemporary English criticism in the English and
cotch reviews or quarterlies. He urges—and himself
emplifies—an independence in literary judgments; he
gerly declares independence. Further, Poe shows in
ch a review as his of Irving's *Astoria* an ardent inter-
t in the western lands of America very characteristic
the Americans of that day. In one review he hotly
bates the question of slavery, naturally concluding
th an emotional plea for the preservation of the happy

status quo. That was to be expected of Poe; but t writing of the articles reveals a journalistic alertn to events, such as readers of *Annabel Lee* or *The H and the Pendulum* are prone to overlook.

There is, finally, a passage in an ironic little artic entitled *Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House,* a pa sage with patent autobiographic reference to remi readers that Poe, experiencing the pinches of a meag profession, yet adhered strongly to it from predile tion.

. . . A young author, struggling with Despair itself in t shape of a ghastly poverty, which has no alleviation—no sy pathy from an every-day world, that cannot understand h necessities, and that would pretend not to understand them it comprehended them ever so well—this young author is p litely requested to compose an article, for which he will " handsomely paid." Enraptured, he neglects perhaps for month the sole employment which affords him the chance a livelihood, and having starved through the month (he a his family) completes at length the month of starvation a the article, and despatches the latter (with a broad hint abo the former) to the pursy "editor" and the bottle-nosed "pr prietor" who has condescended to honor him (the poor dev with his patronage. A month (starving still), and no rep Another month—still none. Two months more—still no A second letter, modestly hinting that the article may n have reached its destination—still no reply. At the expir tion of six additional months, personal application is made the "editor and proprietor's" office. Call again. The po devil goes out and does not fail to call again. Still c again;—and call again is the word for three or four mont more. His patience exhausted, the article is demanded. No he can't have it—(the truth is, it was too good to be giv up so easily)—"it is in print," and "contributions of this cha acter are never paid for (it is a *rule* we have) under s months after publication. Call in six months after the iss

f your affair, and your money is ready for you—for we are usiness men ourselves—prompt." With this the poor devil satisfied, and makes up his mind that the "editor and proietor" is a gentleman, and that of course he (the poor devil) ill wait as requested. And it is supposable that he would ave waited if he could—but Death in the meantime would not. le dies, and by the good luck of his decease (which came by tarvation) the fat "editor and proprietor" is fatter hencebrward and for ever to the amount of five and twenty dolars, very cleverly saved, to be spent generously in canvasacks and champagne.

There are two things which we hope the reader will not o as he runs over this article: first, we hope that he will not elieve that we write from any personal experience of our wn, for we have only the reports of actual sufferers to deend upon; and second, that he will not make any personal pplication of our remarks to any Magazine publisher now ving, it being well known that they are all as remarkable or their generosity and urbanity, as for their intelligence and ppreciation of Genius.

But Poe himself aspired to become an "editor and roprietor"! He wished to be different from the sort e referred to so sarcastically above. Indeed Poe had omething of a vision of what he might make of his rojected magazine.

In short, I could see no reason why a magazine, if worthy e name, could not be made to circulate among twenty thouand subscribers, embracing the best intellect and education of e land. This was a thought which stimulated my fancy and y ambition. The influence of such a journal would be vast deed, and I dreamed of honestly employing that influence the sacred cause of the beautiful, the just, and the true.

n consideration of the way in which magazine work ngrossed Poe, it seems somewhat more natural to at-

tribute his literary theories—especially the theory th comparative brevity is essential in fiction or poetr and his literary practice, which harmonized marvelous with his theory—to journalistic expediency than (J. W. Krutch prefers) to psychologic and artistic lim tations. Nothing proves that Poe, in his attempt an aesthetic, was only trying to rationalize his ow shortcomings. Perhaps he approved of short stori and lyric poems because he was unable to compose lor novels and epics; but as a journalist by inclination ma he not with great likelihood have preferred the sho to the long, have admired it more, have desired mo to excel in it?

Whatever the effect of journalistic ideals was up Poe's creative writing, the quantity and the quality o his magazine work as such—his reviews—both are r markable. The criticisms and reviews have never bee completely collected for issue in volumes, though Ha rison's "Virginia" edition is sufficiently full. In th edition, the so-called criticism occupies more space tha either the short stories or the poems, for reviewing wa Poe's regular business, stories and poems a sort o avocation. Considering the time and place, Poe's r views are just as extraordinary as his other writing though the lapse of years has inevitably impaired the current interest more than that of his creative wor The historic importance of his magazine articles is co siderable. First, they reveal (what Poe pretended scorn) the habits of the reviewers of the day; the is fulsome praise of certain very distinguished fema poets; there is an exploiting of personality and fr quent uncritical diatribe. Then they show, at the

est, the turn that Poe himself was trying to give to that surd type of criticism,—the attempt always to appraise e shortcomings as well as the excellence of a book, e readiness to commend writers even when the public amp of approval was not upon them. Poe estimates ith positiveness the value of a great number (in fact, early all) of writers of his day in America. He feels a duty to expose mediocrity just as much as to dis-over genius. Consequently, the most interesting ap-roach to the typical writing of the early nineteenth entury in America is probably in these articles by Poe n certain literary nonentities.

The only other critical writer of the period with whom oe can profitably be compared is obviously James Rus-ell Lowell. Lowell's literary essays give very little of ie flavor of American writing of the day, for he did ot venture much on reviewing of minor contempo-aries. Perhaps he did not consider them worth his ttention. Whatever the reason, Lowell writes on safe nd approved literary subjects almost always. He cked something of Poe's boldness and energy and riginality of literary creed. But Lowell possessed, of ourse, humor, in which Poe is often deficient, a gen-ine scholarly acquaintance with great writers such as oe never had, and an easy elegance of style quite im-ossible to Poe. Lowell is pleasanter reading, but oe is—though something of a poseur—both original nd dynamic.

II

The selected essays of Poe in this book are intention-ly those upon American writers. Poe wrote many

more criticisms and book-reviews of American boo and writers than of English or any others, and it not difficult to represent his methods and theories ac quately by selections altogether upon American su jects. It is, of course, somewhat regrettable to a student of Poe's criticism to omit such essays as tho upon Macaulay, Elizabeth Barrett, Dickens, and Bu wer; but it is doubtful if Poe exhibits any capacity ev in the best of those omitted reviews that he does not e hibit equally in several of the essays upon American co temporaries. Whatever the present selection may th lack in scope, is perhaps compensated by the unity attains through concentration on American subject In two of the fragments from *Marginalia* are some Poe's reflections upon Tennyson and Shelley. And the *Letter to Mr.* —— —— is a rather incoherent trea ment of Coleridge and Wordsworth. These bits a appended to a substantially American volume, partly samples of Poe's less elaborate criticism, partly as bri reminders of his sensitiveness to current English poetr

The first division of the book includes Poe's tw most successful essays on literary theory—*The Poet Principle* and *The Philosophy of Composition.* The la ter, purporting as it does to be an account of the ma ner in which Poe composed *The Raven,* is still a the retic piece since it clearly expounds his idea of the w in which a poem as such should be composed by a po as such. The mooted question whether or not P wrote as a hoax this recipe for making poems—th question is not of much importance. Hoax or no hoa the essay shows the habit of Poe's mind as well as an thing he ever wrote.

The next division comprises good examples of Poe's careful critical work, particularly in the essays on Bryant and Longfellow. Poe wrote many times upon both those poets—now enthusiastically, now severely. It is very instructive to one studying Poe's development or evolution as a critic to work through chronologically his various essays upon Bryant, or upon Longfellow, or Bulwer, or Hawthorne, for Poe never tired of returning to the discussion of these authors. Lowell was also the subject of more than one of Poe's reviews. The essay on Channing is grouped with the other three merely because it is a painstaking piece of writing upon a contemporary versifier. Channing was no favorite with Poe, and this essay is one of the masterpieces of destruction for which Poe was almost infamous in the eyes of his world.

The third division contains two examples of Poe's reviews of prose writers. The essay on Hawthorne is notable both for sound observations upon Hawthorne and for Poe's most explicit manifesto regarding the province and technique of the prose tale, in writing which he and Hawthorne were surely adepts. In the criticism of Cooper, Poe makes an interesting classification of novelists and an unusually just estimate of Cooper's virtues and deficiencies.

The three essays from the series known as *The Literati* stand together for no better reason than that they were originally associated in publication. In certain respects, these are the most typical cases of Poe's reviewing here presented. Willis and Halleck were two far more popular writers—or at any rate far better liked—than Poe himself; two writers who repre-

sented the American taste in literature in the second quarter of the nineteenth century admirably. Poe, like everyone else, admired them, though he did not so far lose his sense of poetic values as to rank them with Bryant or Longfellow. The essay on Margaret Fuller is worthy of perusal as a case of Poe's tendency to over-eulogize female writers and as his only at all sympathetic treatment of any of the transcendentalist writers of the day.

The set of short pieces from Poe's *Marginalia* (or as one might better call it—Choice Bits Selected from Poe by Poe!) is purposely miscellaneous to show something of Poe's diversity (perhaps superficiality) of interests. Finally, the "Letter to Mr. —— ——," published in 1831 as foreword to a volume of Poe's poems, is such a characteristic if intemperate outburst of the ideas which continually shaped the later writing of Poe that it deserves inclusion.

There are often several authentic, though very different, texts of a given essay by Poe, for he was nowhere more the artist than in his tireless revision of style—even of punctuation. He was also accustomed to republish in a magazine with which he had lately become connected, such articles from those originally issued in other magazines (somewhat revised) as he thought worthy. An editor can at best try to give the text of an essay as it appeared at a certain date in a certain periodical. There has been some preposterous editing of Poe. For example, two or three of Poe's essays on Longfellow have been jumbled and spliced in curious ways to comprise a single essay on Longfellow too often reprinted thus in popular editions of

Poe's works. There is an essay similarly fabricated from three reviews (at widely different dates) on Hawthorne. Poe had materially changed his estimate of Hawthorne as the years passed; so the fabrication is a royal hodge-podge. The essays on Hawthorne and Longfellow in the present collection actually appeared as they here stand at the date assigned. Since Poe was inclined to modify his opinions, even to reverse them, an appended date is necessary and significant.

SELECTIONS FROM POE'S LITERARY CRITICISM

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THE POETIC PRINCIPLE

In speaking of the Poetic Principle, I have no design o be either thorough or profound. While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By "minor poems" I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here, in the beginning, permit me o say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of he poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, "a long poem," is simply a lat contradiction in terms.

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title nly inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The alue of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating xcitement. But all excitements are, through a psyhal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement vhich would entitle a poem to be so called at all, can-

not be sustained throughout a composition of any grea length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very ut most, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then th poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

There are, no doubt, many who have found difficult in reconciling the critical dictum that the "Paradis Lost" is to be devoutly admired throughout, with th absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, durin perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critica dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, i to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight o that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we vie it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserv its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we rea it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the re sult is but a constant alternation of excitement and de pression. After a passage of what we feel to be tru poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitud which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire but if, upon completing the work, we read it agai omitting the first book—that is to say, commencing wit the second—we shall be surprised at now finding tha admirable which we before condemned—that damnab which we had previously so much admired. It follow from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolu effect of even the best epic under the sun, is a nullity —and this is precisely the fact.

In regard to the "Iliad," we have, if not positiv proof, at least very good reason, for believing it i tended as a series of lyrics; but, granting the epic inte tion, I can say only that the work is based in an impe fect sense of Art. The modern epic is, of the su

ositious ancient model, but an inconsiderate and indfold imitation. But the day of these artistic anomies is over. If, at any time, any very long poem *were* opular in reality—which I doubt—it is at least clear iat no very long poem will ever be popular again.

That the extent of a poetical work is, *ceteris paribus,* ie measure of its merit, seems undoubtedly when we ius state it, a proposition sufficiently absurd—yet we re indebted for it to the quarterly Reviews. Surely iere can be nothing in mere *size,* abstractly considered -there can be nothing in mere *bulk,* so far as a volume concerned, which has so continuously elicited admiraon from these saturnine pamphlets! A mountain, to e sure, by the mere sentiment of physical magnitude hich it conveys, *does* impress us with a sense of the iblime—but no man is impressed after *this* fashion by ie material grandeur of even "The Columbiad." Even ie Quarterlies have not instructed us to be so impressed r it. As *yet,* they have not *insisted* on our estimating amartine by the cubic foot, or Pollock by the pound -but what else are we to *infer* from their continual rating about "sustained effort"? If, by "sustained fort," any little gentleman has accomplished an epic, t us frankly commend him for the effort—if this ineed be a thing commendable—but let us forbear praisg the epic on the effort's account. It is to be hoped at common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deding upon a work of Art, rather by the impression it akes—by the effect it produces—than by the time it ok to impress the effect, or by the amount of "susined effort" which had been found necessary in efcting the impression. The fact is, that perseverance

is one thing and genius quite another—nor can all th Quarterlies in Christendom confound them. By and-by, this proposition, with many which I have bee just urging, will be received as self-evident. In th meantime, by being generally condemned as falsitie they will not be essentially damaged as truths.

On the other hand, it is clear that a poem may be in properly brief. Undue brevity degenerates into me epigrammatism. A *very* short poem, while now an then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces profound or enduring effect. There must be the steac pressing down of the stamp upon the wax. De Bérang has wrought innumerable things, pungent and spiri stirring; but, in general, they have been too imponde ous to stamp themselves deeply into the public atte tion; and thus, as so many feathers of fancy, have bee blown aloft only to be whistled down the wind.

A remarkable instance of the effect of undue brevi in depressing a poem—in keeping it out of the popul view—is afforded by the following exquisite little Se enade:

I arise from dreams of thee
  In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
  And the stars are shining bright;
I arise from dreams of thee,
  And a spirit in my feet
Has led me—who knows how?—
  To thy chamber-window, sweet!

The wandering airs they faint
  On the dark, the silent stream;
The champak odors fail
  Like sweet thoughts in a dream;

The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
O, beloved as thou art!

O, lift me from the grass!
I die! I faint! I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast;
O! press it close to thine again,
Where it will break at last!

Very few, perhaps, are familiar with these lines—
et no less a poet than Shelley is their author. Their
arm, yet delicate and ethereal imagination will be ap-
reciated by all—but by none so thoroughly as by him
ho has himself arisen from sweet dreams of one be-
ved, to bathe in the aromatic air of a southern mid-
mmer night.

One of the finest poems by Willis—the very best,
my opinion, which he has ever written—has, no
oubt, through this same defect of undue brevity, been
ept back from its proper position, not less in the crit-
al than in the popular view.

The shadows lay along Broadway,
'Twas near the twilight-tide—
And slowly there a lady fair
Was walking in her pride.
Alone walked she; but, viewlessly,
Walked spirits at her side.

Peace charmed the street beneath her feet,
And Honor charmed the air;

And all astir looked kind on her,
And called her good as fair—
For all God ever gave to her
She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare
From lovers warm and true,—
For her heart was cold to all but gold,
And the rich came not to woo—
But honored well are charms to sell
If priests the selling do.

Now walking there was one more fair—
A slight girl, lily-pale;
And she had unseen company
To make the spirit quail—
'Twixt Want and Scorn she walked forlorn,
And nothing could avail.

No mercy now can clear her brow
For this world's peace to pray;
For, as love's wild prayer dissolved in air,
Her woman's heart gave way!—
But the sin forgiven by Christ in Heaven
By man is cursed alway!

In this composition we find it difficult to recogniz the Willis who has written so many mere "verses c society." The lines are not only richly ideal, but fu of energy; while they breathe an earnestness—an ev dent sincerity of sentiment—for which we look in vai throughout all the other works of this author.

While the epic mania—while the idea that, to mer in poetry, prolixity is indispensable—has, for som years past, been gradually dying out of the public min by mere dint of its own absurdity—we find it su ceeded by a heresy too palpably false to be long to erated, but one which, in the brief period it has alread

ıdured, may be said to have accomplished more in the ɔrruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other ɛemies combined. I allude to the heresy of *The Di-ɑctic*. It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, rectly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all oetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should incul-ɑte a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit the work to be adjudged. We Americans especially ɑve patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, ry especially, have developed it in full. We have taken into our heads that to write a poem simply for the oem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our esign, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting the true Poetic dignity and force—but the simple ɑct is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into ır own souls, we should immediately there discover at under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist ıy work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely ɔble than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem hich is a poem and nothing more—this poem written ɔlely for the poem's sake.

With as deep a reverence for the True as ever in-ɔired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit, some measure, its modes of inculcation. I would mit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them ɣ dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe; ıe has no sympathy with the myrtles. All *that* which so indispensable in Song, is precisely all *that* with hich *she* has nothing whatever to do. It is but mak-g her a flaunting paradox, to wreathe her in gems ıd flowers. In enforcing a truth, we need severity ther than efflorescence of language. We must be sim-

ple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpas sioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poeti cal. *He* must be blind indeed who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthfu and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its three most im mediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure In tellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues them selves. Nevertheless, we find the *offices* of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the Intel lect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs u of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful o Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste content herself with displaying the charms:—waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her dis proportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appro priate, to the harmonious—in a word, to Beauty.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man is thus, plainly, a sense of the beautiful. This it i which administers to his delight in the manfold forms and sounds, and odors, and sentiments amid which h exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, o

he eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odors, and colors, and sentiments, which greet *him* in common with all mankind—he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us—but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry—or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods—we find ourselves melted into tears, not as the Abbaté Gravina supposes through excess of pleasure, but through a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now,* wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which *through* the poem, or *through* the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.

The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness—this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted

—has given to the world all *that* which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and to *fee* as poetic.

The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develop itself in various modes—in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance—very especially in Music—and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden. Our present theme however, has regard only to its manifestation in words. And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct that he is simply silly who declines its assistance—I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It *may* be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained *in fact*. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from a earthly harp are stricken notes which *cannot* have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess, and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.

To recapitulate, then:—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation* o

Beauty. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. *That* pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul,* which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least *most readily* attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work; but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that *Beauty* which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.

I cannot better introduce the few poems which I shall present for your consideration, than by the citation of the "Pröem" to Mr. Longfellow's "Waif":

The day is done, and the darkness
  Falls from the wings of Night,
As a feather is wafted downward
  From an Eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
  Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me,
  That my soul cannot resist;

A feeling of sadness and longing,
  That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
  As the mist resembles the rain.

Come, read to me some poem,
  Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
  And banish the thoughts of day.

Not from the grand old masters,
  Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
  Through the corridors of time.

For, like strains of martial music,
  Their mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavor;
  And to-night I long for rest.

Read from some humbler poet,
  Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
  Or tears from the eyelids start;

Who through long days of labor,
  And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
  Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume
The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares, that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.

With no great range of imagination, these lines have been justly admired for their delicacy of expression. Some of the images are very effective. Nothing can be better than—

the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time.

The idea of the last quatrain is also very effective. The poem, on the whole, however, is chiefly to be admired for the graceful *insouciance* of its metre, so well in accordance with the character of the sentiments, and especially for the *ease* of the general manner. This "ease," or naturalness, in a literary style, it has long been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone—as a point of really difficult attainment. But not so; a natural manner is difficult only to him who should never meddle with it—to the unnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding,

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or with the instinct, that *the tone,* in composition should always be that which the mass of mankind would adopt—and must perpetually vary, of course with the occasion. The author who, after the fashion of "The North American Review," should be, upon *all* occasions, merely "quiet," must necessarily upon *many* occasions, be simply silly, or stupid; and has no more right to be considered "easy," or "natural," than a Cockney exquisite, or than the sleeping Beauty in the wax-works.

Among the minor poems of Bryant, none has so much impressed me as the one which he entitles "June." I quote only a portion of it:

> There, through the long, long summer hours,
> The golden light should lie,
> And thick, young herbs and groups of flowers
> Stand in their beauty by.
> The oriole should build and tell
> His love-tale, close beside my cell;
> The idle butterfly
> Should rest him there, and there be heard
> The housewife-bee and humming bird.
>
> And what, if cheerful shouts, at noon,
> Come, from the village sent,
> Or songs of maids, beneath the moon,
> With fairy laughter blent?
> And what if, in the evening light,
> Betrothèd lovers walk in sight
> Of my low monument?
> I would the lovely scene around
> Might know no sadder sight nor sound.
>
> I know that I no more should see
> The season's glorious show,

Nor would its brightness shine for me
  Nor its wild music flow;
But if, around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
  They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their soften'd hearts should bear
  The thought of what has been,
And speak of one who cannot share
  The gladness of the scene;
Whose part in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills,
  Is—that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
To hear again his living voice.

The rhythmical flow, here, is even voluptuous—nothing could be more melodious. The poem has always affected me in a remarkable manner. The intense melancholy which seems to well up, perforce, to the surface of all the poet's cheerful sayings about his grave, we find thrilling us to the soul—while there is the truest poetic elevation in the thrill. The impression left is one of a pleasurable sadness. And if, in the remaining compositions which I shall introduce to you, there be more or less of a similar tone always apparent, let me remind you that (how or why we know not) this certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty. It is, nevertheless,

A feeling of sadness and longing
  That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
  As the mist resembles the rain.

The taint of which I speak is clearly perceptibl even in a poem so full of brilliancy and spirit as th "Health" of Edward Coote Pinkney:

I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon;
To whom the better elements
And kindly stars have given
A form so fair, that, like the air,
'Tis less of earth than heaven.

Her every tone is music's own,
Like those of morning birds,
And something more than melody
Dwells ever in her words;
The coinage of her heart are they,
And from her lips each flows
As one may see the burden'd bee
Forth issue from the rose.

Affections are as thoughts to her,
The measures of her hours;
Her feelings have the fragrancy,
The freshness of young flowers;
And lovely passions, changing oft,
So fill her, she appears
The image of themselves by turns,—
The idol of past years!

Of her bright face one glance will trace
A picture on the brain,
And of her voice in echoing hearts
A sound must long remain;
But memory, such as mine of her,
So very much endears,
When death is nigh my latest sigh
Will not be life's, but hers.

I fill'd this cup to one made up
  Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
  The seeming paragon—
Her health! and would on earth there stood
  Some more of such a frame,
That life might be all poetry,
  And weariness a name.

It was the misfortune of Mr. Pinkney to have been born too far south. Had he been a New Englander, it is probable that he would have been ranked as the first of American lyrists, by that magnanimous cabal which has so long controlled the destinies of American Letters, in conducting the thing called "The North American Review." The poem just cited is especially beautiful; but the poetic elevation which it induces, we must refer chiefly to our sympathy in the poet's enthusiasm. We pardon his hyperboles for the evident earnestness with which they are uttered.

It was by no means my design, however, to expatiate upon the *merits* of what I should read you. These will necessarily speak for themselves. Boccalini, in his "Advertisements from Parnassus," tells us that Zoilus once presented Apollo a very caustic criticism upon a very admirable book; whereupon the god asked him for the beauties of the work. He replied that he only busied himself about the errors. On hearing this, Apollo, handing him a sack of unwinnowed wheat, bade him pick out *all the chaff* for his reward.

Now this fable answers very well as a hit at the critics; but I am by no means sure that the god was

in the right. I am by no means certain that the true limits of the critical duty are not grossly misunderstood. Excellence, in a poem especially, may be considered in the light of an axiom, which need only be properly *put,* to become self-evident. It is *not* excellence if it require to be demonstrated as such; and thus, to point out too particularly the merits of a work of Art, is to admit that they are *not* merits altogether.

Among the "Melodies" of Thomas Moore, is one whose distinguished character as a poem proper, seems to have been singularly left out of view. I allude to his lines beginning—"Come rest in this bosom." The intense energy of their expression is not surpassed by anything in Byron. There are two of the lines in which a sentiment is conveyed that embodies the *all in all* of the divine passion of Love—a sentiment which, perhaps, has found its echo in more, and in more passionate, human hearts than any other single sentiment ever embodied in words:

Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,
Though the herd have fled from thee, thy home is still here
Here still is the smile, that no cloud can o'ercast,
And a heart and a hand all thy own to the last.

Oh! what was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory and shame
I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.

Thou hast call'd me thy Angel in moments of bliss,
And thy Angel I'll be, 'mid the horrors of this,—
Through the furnace, unshrinking, thy steps to pursue,
And shield thee, and save thee,—or perish there too!

It has been the fashion, of late days, to deny Moore Imagination, while granting him Fancy—a distinction originating with Coleridge, than whom no man more fully comprehended the great powers of Moore. The fact is, that the fancy of this poet so far predominates over all his other faculties, and over the fancy of all other men, as to have induced, very naturally, the idea that he is fanciful *only*. But never was there a greater mistake. Never was a grosser wrong done the fame of a true poet. In the compass of the English language I can call to mind no poem more profoundly, more weirdly *imaginative,* in the best sense, than the lines commencing—"I would I were by that dim lake," which are the composition of Thomas Moore. I regret that I am unable to remember them.

One of the noblest—and, speaking of Fancy, one of the most singularly fanciful of modern poets, was Thomas Hood. His "Fair Ines" had always, for me, an inexpressible charm:—

O saw ye not fair Ines?
  She's gone into the West,
To dazzle when the sun is down,
  And rob the world of rest;
She took our daylight with her,
  The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek,
  And pearls upon her breast.

O turn again, fair Ines,
  Before the fall of night,
For fear the moon should shine alone,
  And stars unrivalled bright;
And blessed will the lover be
  That walks beneath their light,

And breathes the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write!

Would I had been, fair Ines,
That gallant cavalier
Who rode so gaily by thy side,
And whispered thee so near!
Were there no bonny dames at home,
Or no true lovers here,
That he should cross the seas to win
The dearest of the dear?

I saw thee, lovely Ines,
Descend along the shore,
With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners waved before;
And gentle youth and maidens gay,
And snowy plumes they wore;
It would have been a beauteous dream—
If it had been no more!

Alas, alas, fair Ines!
She went away with song,
With Music waiting on her steps,
And shoutings of the throng;
But some were sad and felt no mirth,
But only Music's wrong,
In sounds that sang Farewell, Farewell,
To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines,
That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its deck,
Nor danced so light before.
Alas for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore!
The smile that blest one lover's heart
Has broken many more.

"The Haunted House," by the same author, is one of the truest poems ever written; one of the *truest,* one of the most unexceptionable, one of the most thoroughly artistic, both in its theme and in its execution. It is, moreover, powerfully ideal—imaginative. I regret that its length renders it unsuitable for the purposes of this Lecture. In place of it, permit me to offer the universally appreciated "Bridge of Sighs."

One more Unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!

Look at her garments
Clinging like cerements;
Whilst the wave constantly
Drips from her clothing;
Take her up instantly,
Loving, not loathing.

Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her mournfully,
Gently and humanly;
Not of the stains of her,—
All that remains of her
Now is pure womanly.

Make no deep scrutiny
Into her mutiny
Rash and undutiful:

Past all dishonor,
Death has left on her
Only the beautiful.

Still, for all slips of hers,
One of Eve's family—
Wipe those poor lips of hers
Oozing so clammily.

Loop up her tresses
Escaped from the comb,
Her fair auburn tresses;
Whilst wonderment guesses
Where was her home?

Who was her father?
Who was her mother?
Had she a sister?
Had she a brother?
Or was there a dearer one
Still, and a nearer one
Yet, than all other?

Alas! for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!
Oh! it was pitiful!
Near a whole city full,
Home she had none.

Sisterly, brotherly,
Fatherly, motherly,
Feelings had changed;
Love, by harsh evidence,
Thrown from its eminence;
Even God's providence
Seeming estranged.

Where the lamps quiver
So far in the river,

With many a light
From window and casement,
From garret to basement,
She stood, with amazement,
Houseless by night.

The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver,
But not the dark arch,
Or the black flowing river:
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurl'd—
Anywhere, anywhere
Out of the world!

In she plunged boldly,
No matter how coldly
The rough river ran,—
Over the brink of it,
Picture it,—think of it,
Dissolute Man!
Lave in it, drink of it
Then, if you can!

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!

Ere her limbs frigidly
Stiffen too rigidly,
Decently—kindly—
Smooth, and compose them;
And her eyes, close them,
Staring so blindly!

Dreadfully staring
Through muddy impurity.

As when with the daring
Last look of despairing
Fixed on futurity.

Perishing gloomily,
Spurred by contumely,
Cold inhumanity,
Burning insanity,
Into her rest.—
Cross her hands humbly,
As if praying dumbly,
Over her breast!
Owning her weakness,
Her evil behavior,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Savior!

The vigor of this poem is no less remarkable than its pathos. The versification, although carrying the fanciful to the very verge of the fantastic, is nevertheless admirably adapted to the wild insanity which is the thesis of the poem.

Among the minor poems of Lord Byron, is one which has never received from the critics the praise which it undoubtedly deserves:—

Though the day of my destiny's over,
And the star of my fate hath declined,
Thy soft heart refused to discover
The faults which so many could find;
Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,
It shrunk not to share it with me,
And the love which my spirit hath painted
It never hath found but in *thee*.

Then when nature around me is smiling,
The last smile which answers to mine,

I do not believe it beguiling,
Because it reminds me of thine;
And when winds are at war with the ocean,
As the breasts I believed in with me,
If their billows excite an emotion,
It is that they bear me from *thee*.

Though the rock of my last hope is shivered,
And its fragments are sunk in the wave,
Though I feel that my soul is delivered
To pain—it shall not be its slave.
There is many a pang to pursue me;
They may crush, but they shall not contemn;
They may torture, but shall not subdue me;
'Tis of *thee* that I think—not of them.

Though human, thou didst not deceive me;
Though woman, thou didst not forsake;
Though loved, thou forborest to grieve me;
Though slandered, thou never couldst shake;
Though trusted, thou didst not disclaim me;
Though parted, it was not to fly;
Though watchful, 'twas not to defame me;
Nor mute, that the world might belie.

Yet I blame not the world, nor despise it,
Nor the war of the many with one—
If my soul was not fitted to prize it,
'Twas folly not sooner to shun;
And if dearly that error hath cost me,
And more than I once could forsee,
I have found that, whatever it lost me,
It could not deprive me of *thee*.

From the wreck of the past, which hath perished,
Thus much I at least may recall:
It hath taught me that what I most cherished
Deserved to be dearest of all.

In the desert a fountain is springing,
In the wide waste there still is a tree,
And a bird in the solitude singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of *thee*.

Although the rhythm, here, is one of the most difficult, the versification could scarcely be improved. No nobler *theme* ever engaged the pen of poet. It is the soul-elevating idea, that no man can consider himself entitled to complain of Fate while, in his adversity, he still retains the unwavering love of woman.

From Alfred Tennyson—although in perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived—I have left myself time to cite only a very brief specimen. I call him, and *think* him the noblest of poets, *not* because the impressions he produces are, at *all* times, the most profound, *not* because the poetical excitement which he induces is, at *all* times, the most intense, but because it is, at all times, the most ethereal,—in other words, the most elevating and the most pure. No poet is so little of the earth, earthy. What I am about to read is from his last long poem, "The Princess":—

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld;
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

Thus, although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavored to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle. It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul,* quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart, or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade rather than elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love, the true, the divine Eros, the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionæan Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth—if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth, we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience at once the true poetical effect; but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a dis-

tinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mer reference to a few of the simple elements which induc in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recog nizes the ambrosia which nourishes his soul, in th bright orbs that shine in Heaven, in the volutes of th flower, in the clustering of low shrubberies, in the wav ing of the grain-fields, in the slanting of tall, Easter trees, in the blue distance of mountains, in the group ing of clouds, in the twinkling of half-hidden brook in the gleaming of silver rivers, in the repose of seques tered lakes, in the star-mirroring depths of lonely well He perceives it in the songs of birds, in the harp o Æolus, in the sighing of the night-wind, in the re pining voice of the forest, in the surf that complain to the shore, in the fresh breath of the woods, in th scent of the violet, in the voluptuous perfume of th hyacinth, in the suggestive odor that comes to him, a eventide, from far-distant, undiscovered islands, ove dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns i in all noble thoughts, in all unworldly motives, in a holy impulses, in all chivalrous, generous, and self sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman in the grace of her step, in the lustre of her eye, in th melody of her voice, in her soft laughter, in her sigh, i the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deepl feels it in her winning endearments, in her burnin enthusiasms, in her gentle charities, in her meek an devotional endurances; but above all—ah! far abov all—he kneels to it, he worships it in the faith, in th purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majest of her *love*.

Let me conclude by the the recitation of yet anothe

brief poem—one very different in character from any that I have before quoted. It is by Motherwell, and is called "The Song of the Cavalier." With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impiety of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier.

Then mounte! then mounte, brave gallants, all,
And don your helmes amaine:
Deathe's couriers, Fame and Honor, call
Us to the field againe.
No shrewish teares shall fill our eye
When the sword-hilt's in our hand;
Heart-whole we'll part, and no whit sighe
For the fayrest of the land;
Let piping swaine, and craven wight,
Thus weepe and puling crye,
Our business is like men to fight,
And hero-like to die!

1850

THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION

Charles Dickens, in a note now lying before me alluding to an examination I once made of th mechanism of "Barnaby Rudge," says—"By the way are you aware that Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams backwards? He first involved his hero in a web o difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, fo the first, cast about him for some mode of accountin for what had been done."

I cannot think this the *precise* mode of procedur on the part of Godwin—and indeed what he himsel acknowledges, is not altogether in accordance wit Mr. Dickens' idea; but the author of "Caleb Williams was too good an artist not to perceive the advantag derivable from at least a somewhat similar process Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth th name, must be elaborated to its dénouement befor anything be attempted with the pen. It is only wit the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can giv a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation by making the incidents, and especially the tone at a points, tend to the development of the intention.

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mod of constructing a story. Either history affords thesis, or one is suggested by an incident of the da or, at best, the author sets himself to work in th

combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative, designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or autorial comment, whatever crevices of fact, or action, may, from page to page, render themselves apparent.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place,—"Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone—afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say; but, perhaps, the autorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition; and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the

scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities o thought, at the true purposes seized only at the las moment, at the innumerable glimpses of idea tha arrived not at the maturity of full view, at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable at the cautious selections and rejections, at the painfu erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheel and pinions, the tackle for scene-shifting, the step ladders and demon-traps—the cock's feathers, the re paint and the black patches, which, in the ninety-nin cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties o the literary *histrio*.

I am aware, on the other hand, that the case is b no means common, in which an author is at all i condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusion have been attained. In general, suggestions, havin arisen pell-mell, are pursued and forgotten in a simila manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with th repugnance alluded to, nor, at any time, the leas difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps o any of my compositions and, since the interest of a analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considere a *desideratum,* is quite independent of any real o fancied interest in the thing analyzed, it will not b regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to sho the *modus operandi* by which some one of my ow works was put together. I select "The Raven" a most generally known. It is my design to render i manifest that no one point in its composition is refer able either to accident or intuition; that the work pro

ceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, *per se,* the circumstance—or say the necessity—which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing *a* poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste.

We commence, then, with this intention.

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression; for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, *ceteris paribus,* no poet can afford to dispense with *anything* that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once. What we term a long poem, is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief. For this reason, at least one half of the "Paradise Lost" is essentially prose—a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, *inevitably,* with corresponding depressions—the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect.

It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit,

as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting; and that, although in certain classes of prose composition, such as "Robinson Crusoe" (demanding no unity), this limit may be advantageously overpassed, it can never properly be overpassed in a poem. Within this limit, the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—in other words, to the excitement or elevation—again, in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect:—this, with one proviso—that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.

Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical, taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper *length* for my intended poem—a length of about one hundred lines. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight.

My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work *universally* appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical stands not in the slightest need of demonstration—the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which some of my friends have evinced a disposition to misrepresent. That pleas

ure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect; they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul—not* of intellect, or of heart—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful." Now I designate Beauty as the province of the poem, merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes—that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation alluded to, is *most readily* attained in the poem. Now the object, Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable, to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion a *homeliness* (the truly passionate will comprehend me), which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. It by no means follows from anything here said, that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced, into a poem—for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast; but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation; and all experience has shown that this tone is one of *sadness*. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.

The length, the province, and the tone, being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects—or more properly *points*, in the theatrical sense—I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the *refrain*. The universality of its employment sufficed to assure me of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of improvement, and soon saw it to be in a primitive condition. As commonly used, the *refrain*, or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity—of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so heighten, the effect, by adhering, in general, to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of *the application* of the *refrain*—the *refrain* itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried.

These points being settled, I next bethought me of the *nature* of my *refrain*. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied, it was clear that the *refrain* itself must be brief, for there would have been an insurmountable difficulty in frequent variations of application in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brevity of the sentence, would, of course, be the facility of the variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best *refrain*.

The question now arose as to the *character* of the word. Having made up my mind to a *refrain*, the division of the poem into stanzas was, of course, a corollary: the *refrain* forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt; and these considerations, inevitably led me to the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the *refrain* being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself.

The next *desideratum* was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word "Nevermore." In observing the difficulty which I at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition, I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the pre-assumption that the word was to be so

continuously or monotonously spoken by a *human* being; I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotony with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here, then, immediately arose the idea of a *non*-reasoning creature capable of speech; and, very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven, as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended *tone.*

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven —the bird of ill omen—monotonously repeating the one word, "Nevermore," at the conclusion of each stanza in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object *supremeness,* or perfection, at all points, I asked myself—"Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?" Death—was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious—"When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty;* the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."

I had now to combine the two ideas, of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore." I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn the *application* of the word repeated; but the only

intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded to the effect on which I had been depending—that is to say, the effect of the *variation of application.* I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover—the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore"—that I could make this first query a commonplace one, the second less so, the third still less, and so on, until at length the lover, startled from his original *nonchalance* by the melancholy character of the word itself, by its frequent repetition, and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it, is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character—queries whose solution he has passionately at heart—propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture—propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which, reason assures him, is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the *expected* "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me—or, more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of the construction—I first established in mind the climax, or concluding query—that query to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place an answer—that query in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the uttermost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

Here then the poem may be said to have its beginning—at the end, where all works of art should begin; for it was here, at this point of my preconsiderations, that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza:—

"Prophet," said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!
By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore,
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

I composed this stanza, at this point, first that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover, and, secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza, as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able, in the subsequent composition, to construct more vigorous stanzas, I should, without scruple, have purposely enfeebled them, so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect.

And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected, in versification, is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of

variety in mere *rhythm,* it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite—and yet, *for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing.* The fact is, that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.

Of course, I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the "Raven." The former is trochaic, the latter is octameter acatalectic, alternating with heptameter catalectic repeated in the *refrain* of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrameter catalectic. Less pedantically—the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by a short; the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet, the second of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds), the third of eight, the fourth of seven and a half, the fifth the same, the sixth three and a half. Now, each of these lines, taken individually, has been employed before, and what originality the "Raven" has, is in their combination *into stanza;* nothing even remotely approaching this combination has ever been attempted. The effect of this originality of combination is aided by other unusual, and some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration.

The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and the Raven; and the first branch of this consideration was the *locale.* For

this the most natural suggestion might seem to be
forest, or the fields; but it has always appeared to m
that a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely neces
sary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the forc
of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable mora
power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, o
course, must not be confounded with mere unity o
place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his cham
ber—in a chamber rendered sacred to him by memorie
of her who had frequented it. The room is repre
sented as richly furnished—this in mere pursuance o
the ideas I have already explained on the subject o
Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The *locale* being thus determined, I had now to in
troduce the bird—and the thought of introducing hir
through the window was inevitable. The idea of mak
ing the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flap
ping of the wings of the bird against the shutter, is
"tapping" at the door, originated in the wish to increase
by prolonging, the reader's curiosity, and in desire t
admit the incidental effect arising from the lover'
throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thenc
adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of hi
mistress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first, to account fo
the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for th
effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity withi
the chamber.

I made the bird alight on the bust of *Pallas,* als
for the effect of contrast between the marble and th
plumage—it being understood that the bust was abso

lutely *suggested* by the bird; the bust of *Pallas* being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover, and, secondly, for the sonorousness of the word *Pallas,* itself.

About the middle of the poem, also, I have availed myself of the force of contrast, with a view of deepening the ultimate impression. For example, an air of the fantastic, approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible, is given to the Raven's entrance. He comes in "with many a flirt and flutter."

. . . . . .

Not the *least obeisance made he;* not a moment stopped or stayed he;
But with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door.

In the two stanzas which follow, the design is more obviously carried out:—

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling
By the *grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,*—
"Though thy *crest be shorn and shaven,* thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the nightly shore:
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore?"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

. . . . . .

Much I marvelled *this ungainly fowl* to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

The effect of the *dénouement* being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness:—this tone commencing in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with the line,

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only etc.

From this epoch the lover no longer jests—no longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the Raven's demeanor. He speaks of him as a "grim, ungainly ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore," and feels the "fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core." This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader—to bring the mind into a proper frame for the *dénouement*, which is now brought about as rapidly and as *directly* as possible.

With the *dénouement* proper—with the Raven's reply "Nevermore," to the lover's final demand if he shall meet his mistress in another world—the poem, in its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be said to have its completion. So far, everything is within the limits of the accountable, of the real. A raven, having learned by rote the single word "Nevermore," and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven

at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams —the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased. The casement being thrown open at the fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who, amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor's demeanor, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, "Nevermore"—a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore." The student now guesses the state of the case, but is compelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Nevermore." With the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

But in subjects, so handled, however skilfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness, which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required: first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness,

some under current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal.* It is the *excess* of the suggested meaning—it is rendering this the upper instead of the under current of the theme—which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem—their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The under current of meaning is rendered first apparent in the lines—

> "Take thy beak from out *my heart,* and take thy form from off my door!"
> Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore!"

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical—but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* is permitted distinctly to be seen:—

> And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
> On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
> And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,

And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul *from out that shadow* that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore.

1846

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

Mr. Bryant's position in the poetical world is, perhaps, better settled than that of any American. There is less difference of opinion about his rank; but, as usual, the agreement is more decided in private literary circles than in what appears to be the public expression of sentiment as gleaned from the press. I may as well observe here, too, that this coincidence of opinion in private circles is in all cases very noticeable when compared with the discrepancy of the apparent public opinion. In private it is quite a rare thing to find any strongly-marked disagreement—I mean, of course, about mere autorial merit. The author accustomed to seclusion, and mingling for the first time freely with the literary people about him, is invariably startled and delighted to find that the decisions of his own unbiased judgment—decisions to which he has refrained from giving voice on account of their broad contradiction to the decision of the press—are sustained and considered quite as matters of course by almost every person with whom he converses. The fact is, that when brought face to face with each other, we are constrained to a certain amount of honesty by the sheer trouble it causes us to mould the countenance to a lie. We put on paper with a grave air what we could not for our lives assert personally to a friend without either blushing or laughing outright. That the opinion of the press

is not an honest opinion, that necessarily it is impossible that it should be an honest opinion, is never denied by the members of the press themselves. Individual presses, of course, are now and then honest, but I speak of the combined effect. Indeed, it would be difficult for those conversant with the *modus operandi* of public journals to deny the general falsity of impression conveyed. Let in America a book be published by an unknown, careless or uninfluential author; if he publishes it "on his own account," he will be confounded at finding that no notice of it is taken at all. If it has been entrusted to a publisher of *caste,* there will appear forthwith in each of the leading *business* papers a variously-phrased *critique* to the extent of three or four lines, and to the effect that "we have received, from the fertile press of So and So, a volume entitled This and That, which appears to be well worthy persual, and which is 'got up' in the customary neat style of the enterprising firm of So and So." On the other hand, let our author have acquired influence, experience, or (what will stand him in good stead of either) effrontery, on the issue of his book he will obtain from his publisher a hundred copies (or more, as the case may be,) "for distribution among friends connected with the press." Armed with these, he will call personally either at the office or (if he understands his game) at the private residence of every editor within his reach, enter into conversation, compliment the journalist, interest him, as if incidentally, in the subject of the book, and finally, watching an opportunity, beg leave to hand him "a volume which, quite opportunely, is on the very matter now under discussion." If the editor seems sufficiently

interested, the rest is left to fate; but if there is any lukewarmness, (usually indicated by a polite regret on the editor's part that he really has "no time to render the work that justice which its importance demands,") then our author is prepared to understand and to sympathize; has, luckily, a friend thoroughly conversant with the topic, and who (perhaps) could be persuaded to write some account of the volume—provided that the editor would be kind enough just to glance over the *critique* and amend it in accordance with his own particular views. Glad to fill half a column or so of his editorial space, and still more glad to get rid of his visitor, the journalist assents. The author retires, consults the friend, instructs him touching the strong points of the volume, and insinuating in *some* shape a *quid pro quo,* gets an elaborate *critique* written, (or, what is more usual and far more simple, writes it himself,) and his business in this individual quarter is accomplished. Nothing more than sheer impudence is requisite to accomplish it at all.

Now the effect of this system (for it has really grown to be such) is obvious. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, men of genius, too indolent and careless about worldly concerns to bestir themselves after this fashion, have also that pride of intellect which would prevent them, under any circumstances, from even insinuating, by the presentation of a book to a member of the press, a desire to have that book reviewed. They, consequently, and their works, are utterly overwhelmed and extinguished in the flood of the *apparent* public adulation upon which in gilded barges are borne triumphant the ingenious toady and the diligent quack.

In general, the books of the toadies and quacks, not being read at all, are safe from any contradiction of this self-bestowed praise; but now and then it happens that the excess of the laudation works out in part its own remedy. Men of leisure, hearing one of the toady works commended, look at it, read its preface and a few pages of its body, and throw it aside with disgust, wondering at the ill taste of the *editors* who extol it. But there is an iteration, and then a continuous reiteration of the panegyric, till these men of leisure begin to suspect themselves in the wrong, to fancy that there may really be something good lying *perdu* in the volume. In a fit of desperate curiosity they read it through critically, their indignation growing hotter at each succeeding page till it gets the better even of contempt. The result is, that reviews now appear in various quarters entirely at variance with the opinions so generally expressed, and which, but for these indignation reviews, would have passed universally current as the opinion of the public. It is in this manner that those gross *seeming* discrepancies arise which so often astonish us, but which vanish instantaneously in private society.

But although it may be said, in general, that Mr. Bryant's position is *comparatively* well settled, still for some time past there has been a growing tendency to under-estimate him. The new licentious "schools" of poetry—I do not now speak of the transcendentalists, who are the merest nobodies, fatiguing even themselves—but the Tennysonian and Barrettian schools, having, in their rashness of spirit, much in accordance with the whole spirit of the age, thrown into the shade necessarily all that seems akin to the conservatism of half a

century ago. The conventionalities, even the most jus
tifiable *decora* of composition, are regarded, *per se*, wit
a suspicious eye. When I say *per se*, I mean that, fro
finding them so long in connexion with conservatism o
thought, we have come at last to dislike them, not merel
as the outward visible signs of that conservatism, bu
as things evil in themselves. It is very clear that thos
accuracies and elegancies of style, and of general man
ner, which in the time of Pope were considered as *prim
facie* and indispensable indications of genius, are no
conversely regarded. How few are willing to adm
the possibility of reconciling genius with artistic skil
Yet this reconciliation is not only possible, but an ab
solute necessity. It is a mere prejudice which ha
hitherto prevented the union, by studiously insistin
upon a natural repulsion which not only does not exis
but which is at war with all the analogies of natur
The greatest poems will not be written until this pre
udice is annihilated; and I mean to express a very ex
alted opinion of Mr. Bryant when I say that his work
in time to come will do much towards the annihila
tion.

I have never disbelieved in the perfect consistenc
and even congeniality, of the highest genius and th
profoundest art; but in the case of the author of "Th
Ages," I *have* fallen into the general error of unde
valuing his poetic ability on account of the mere "el
gancies and accuracies" to which allusion has alread
been made. I confess that, with an absolute abstra
tion from all personal feelings, and with the most si
cere intention to do justice, I was at one period beguil
into this popular error; there can be no difficulty, ther

fore, on my part, in excusing the inadvertence in others.

It will never do to claim for Bryant a genius of the loftiest order, but there has been latterly, since the days of Mr. Longfellow and Mr. Lowell, a growing disposition to deny him *genius* in *any* respect. He is now commonly spoken of as "a man of high poetical *talent*, very *'correct,'* with a warm appreciation of the beauty of nature and great descriptive powers, but rather too much of the old-school manner of Cowper, Goldsmith and Young." This is the truth, but not the whole truth. Mr. Bryant has genius, and that of a marked character, but it has been overlooked by modern schools, because deficient in those externals which have become in a measure symbolical of those schools.

Dr. Griswold, in summing up his comments on Bryant, has the following significant objections: "His genius is not versatile; he has related no history; he has not sung of the passion of love; he has not described artificial life. Still the tenderness and feeling in 'The Death of the Flowers,' 'Rizpah,' 'The Indian Girl's Lament,' and other pieces, show that he might have excelled in delineations of the gentler passions had he made them his study."

Now, in describing *no* artificial life, in relating *no* history, in *not* singing the passion of love, the poet has merely shown himself the profound artist, has merely evinced a proper consciousness that such are not the legitimate themes of poetry. That they are not, I have repeatedly shown, or attempted to show, and to go over the demonstration now would be foreign to the gossiping and desultory nature of the present article. What Dr. Griswold means by "the gentler

passions" is, I presume, not very clear to himself, b
it is possible that he employs the phrase in consequen
of the gentle, unpassionate emotion induced by t
poems of which he quotes the titles. It is precisely th
"unpassionate emotion" which is the limit of the tr
poetical art. Passion proper and poesy are discordan
Poetry, in elevating, tranquilizes *the soul*. With *t*
heart it has nothing to do. For a fuller explanati
of these views I refer the reader to an analysis of
poem by Mrs. Welby—an analysis contained in an a
ticle called "Marginalia," and published about a ye
ago in "The Democratic Review."

The editor of "The Poets and Poetry of Americ
thinks the literary precocity of Bryant remarkab
"There are few recorded *more* remarkable," he say
The first edition of "The Embargo" was in 1808, a
the poet was born in 1794; he was more than thirte
then, when the satire was printed—although it is r
ported to have been written a year earlier. I quote
few lines.

> Oh, might some patriot rise, the gloom dispel,
> Chase Error's mist and break the magic spell!
> But vain the wish; for, hark! the murmuring meed
> Of hoarse applause from yonder shed proceed.
> Enter and view the thronging concourse there,
> Intent with gaping mouth and stupid stare;
> While in the midst their supple leader stands,
> Harangues aloud and flourishes his hands,
> To adulation tunes his servile throat,
> And sues successful for each blockhead's vote.

This is a fair specimen of the whole, both as regar
its satirical and rhythmical power. A satire is,

course, no *poem*. I have known boys of an earlier age do better things, although the case is rare. All depends upon the course of education. Bryant's father "was familiar with the best English literature, and perceiving in his son indications of superior genius, attended carefully to his instruction, taught him the art of composition, and guided his literary taste." This being understood, the marvel of such verse as I have quoted ceases at once, even admitting it to be thoroughly the boy's own work; but it is difficult to make any such admission. The father *must* have suggested, revised, retouched.

The longest poem of Bryant is "The Ages"—thirty-five Spenserian stanzas. It is the one improper theme of its author. The design is, "from a survey of the past ages of the world, and of the successive advances of mankind in knowledge and virtue, to justify and confirm the hopes of the philanthropist for the future destinies of the human race." All this would have been more rationally, because more effectually, accomplished in prose. Dismissing it as a poem, (which in its general tendency it is not,) one might commend the force of its argumentation but for the radical error of deducing a hope of *progression* from the *cycles* of physical nature.

The sixth stanza is a specimen of noble versification (within the narrow limits of the Iambic Pentameter).

> Look on this beautiful world and read the truth
> In her fair page; see, every season brings
> New change in her of everlasting youth;
> Still the green soil with joyous living things

> Swarms; the wide air is full of joyous wings;
> And myriads still are happy in the sleep
> Of Ocean's azure gulfs and where he flings
> The restless surge. Eternal Love doth keep
> In his complacent arms, the earth, the air, the deep.

The cadences here at *page, swarms* and *surge,* can not be surpassed. There are comparatively few consonants. Liquids and the softer vowels abound, and the partial line after the pause at "surge," with the stately march of the succeeding Alexandrine, is one of the finest conceivable *finales.*

The poem, in general, has unity, completeness. It tone of calm, elevated and hopeful contemplation, well sustained throughout. There is an occasional quaint grace of expression, as in

> Nurse of full streams and lifter up of proud
> Sky-mingling mountains that o'erlook the cloud!

or of antithetical and rhythmical force combined, as i

> The shock that hurled
> To dust, in many fragments dashed and strown
> The throne whose roots were in another world
> And whose far-stretching shadow awed our own.

But we look in vain for anything more worthy commendation.

"Thanatopsis" is the poem by which its author best known, but is by no means his best poem. owes the *extent* of its celebrity to its nearly absolu freedom from *defect,* in the ordinary understanding the term. I mean to say that its negative merit recommends it to the public attention. It is a thoughtfu well phrased, well constructed, well versified poem

The concluding thought is exceedingly noble, and has done wonders for the success of the whole composition.

"The Waterfowl" is very beautiful, but like "Thanatopsis," owes a great deal to its completeness and pointed termination.

"Oh, Fairest of the Rural Maids!" will strike every poet as the truest *poem* written by Bryant. It is richly ideal.

"June" is sweet and perfectly well modulated in its rhythm, and inexpressibly pathetic. It serves well to illustrate my previous remarks about passion in its connexion with poetry. In "June" there is, very properly, nothing of the intense *passion* of grief, but the subdued sorrow which comes up, as if perforce, to the surface of the poet's gay sayings about his grave, we find thrilling us to the soul, while there is yet a spiritual *elevation* in the thrill.

And what if cheerful shouts at noon
  Come, from the village sent,
Or songs of maids beneath the moon
  With fairy laughter blent?
And what if, in the evening light,
Betrothed lovers walk in sight
  Of my low monument?
I would the lovely scene around
Might know no sadder sight nor sound.
I know—I know I should not see
  The season's glorious show,
Nor would its brightness shine for me
  Nor its wild music flow;
But if around my place of sleep
The friends I love should come to weep,
  They might not haste to go:—
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom,
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

The thoughts here belong to the highest class
poetry, the imaginative-natural, and are of themselv
sufficient to stamp their author a man of genius.

I copy at random a few passages of similar cast, i
ducing a similar conviction.

The great heavens
Seem to stoop down upon the scene in love,
A nearer vault and of a tenderer blue
Than that which bends above the eastern hills. . . .

Till twilight blushed, and lovers walked and wooed
In a forgotten language and *old tunes*
From instruments of unremembered form
Gave the soft winds a voice. . . .

Breezes of the south,
That toss the golden and the flame-like flowers,
And pass the prairie hawk, that, poised on high,
Flaps his broad wings, yet moves not. . . .

On the breast of earth
I lie, and listen to her mighty voice—
A voice of many tones sent up from streams
That wander through the gloom, from woods unseen;
Swayed by the sweeping of the tides of air;
From rocky chasms where darkness dwells all day
And hollows of the great invisible hills,
And sands that edge the ocean, stretching far
Into the night—a melancholy sound! . . .

All the green herbs
Are stirring in his breath; *a thousand flowers*
By the road side and the borders of the brook,
Nod gayly to each other.

[There is a fine "echo of sound to sense" in "t
borders of the brook," etc.; and in the same poe

from which these lines are taken, ("The Summer Wind,") may be found two other equally happy examples, e. g.—

> For me, I lie
> *Languidly in the shade,* where the thick turf,
> Yet virgin from the kisses of the sun,
> Retains some freshness.

And again—

> All is silent, save the faint
> And interrupted murmur of the bee
> *Settling on the sick flowers,* and then again
> Instantly on the wing.

I resume the imaginative extracts.]

> Paths, homes, graves, ruins from the lowest glen
> *To where life shrinks from the fierce Alpine air. . . .*
>
> *And the blue gentian flower that in the breeze*
> *Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last. . . .*
>
> *A shoot of that old vine that made*
> *The nations silent in the shade. . . .*
>
> *But 'neath yon crimson tree,*
> *Lover to listening maid might breathe his flame,*
> *Nor mark, within its roseate canopy,*
> *Her flush of maiden shame. . . .*
>
> The mountains that infold,
> In their wild sweep, the colored landscape round,
> Seem *groups of giant kings in purple and gold*
> *That guard the enchanted ground.*

[This latter passage is especially beautiful. Happily to endow inanimate nature with sentience and a

capability of action, is one of the severest tests of the poet.]

. . . There is a power whose care
Teaches thy way along *that pathless coast,*
The desert and illimitable air.
Lone wandering, but not lost. . . .

Pleasant shall be thy way, *where weekly bows*
The shutting flower, and darkling waters pass,
And 'twixt the o'ershadowing branches and the grass. . . .

Sweet odors in the sea air, sweet and strange,
Shall tell the home-sick mariner of the shore,
And, listening to thy murmur, he shall deem
He hears the rustling leaf and running stream. . . .

In a "Sonnet, To——," are some richly imaginative lines. I quote the whole.

Ay, thou art for the grave; thy glances shine
Too brightly to shine long: another spring
Shall deck her for men's eyes, but not for thine,
Sealed in a sleep which knows no wakening.
The fields for thee have no medicinal leaf,
And the vexed ore no mineral of power;
And they who love thee wait in anxious grief
Till the slow plague shall bring the fatal hour.
Glide softly to thy rest, then: death should come
Gently to one of gentle mould like thee,
As light winds wandering through groves of bloom,
Detach the delicate blossom from the tree,
Close thy sweet eyes calmly and without pain,
And we will trust in God to see thee yet again.

The happiest *finale* to these brief extracts will be the magnificent conclusion of "Thanatopsis."

So live, that, when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave—
Like one that draws the drapery of his couch
About him and lies down to pleasant dreams.

In the minor morals of the muse Mr. Bryant excels. In versification (*as far as he goes*) he is unsurpassed in America—unless, indeed, by Mr. Sprague. Mr. Longfellow is not so thorough a versifier within Mr. Bryant's limits, but a far better one upon the whole, on account of his greater range. Mr. B., however, is by no means always accurate—or defensible, for accurate is not the term. His lines are occasionally unpronounceable through excess of harsh consonants, as in

As if they loved to breast the breeze that sweeps the cool clear sky.

Now and then he gets out of his depth in attempting anapæstic rhythm, of which he makes sad havoc, as in

And Rispah, once the loveliest of all
That bloomed and smiled in the court of Saul.

Not unfrequently, too, even his pentameters are inexcusably rough, as in

Kind influence. Lo! their orbs burn more bright.

which can only be read metrically by drawing out "influence" into three marked syllables, shortening the long monosyllable "Lo!" and lengthening the short one "their."

Mr. Bryant is not devoid of mannerisms, one of the most noticeable of which is his use of the epithet "old" preceded by some other adjective, e. g.—

In all that proud old world beyond the deep; . . .

There is a tale about these gray old rocks; . . .

The wide old woods resounded with her song; . . .

And from the gray old trunks that high in heaven, . . .

etc. etc. etc. These duplicates occur so frequently as to excite a smile upon each repetition.

Of merely grammatical errors the poet is rarely guilty. Faulty constructions are more frequently chargeable to him. In "The Massacre of Scio" we read—

Till the last link of slavery's chain
Is shivered to be worn no more.

What shall be worn no more? The chain, of course —but the link is implied. It will be understood that I pick these flaws only with difficulty from the poems of Bryant. He is, in the "minor morals," the most generally correct of our poets.

He is now fifty-two years of age. In height, he is perhaps, five feet nine. His frame is rather robust. His features are large but thin. His countenance is sallow, nearly bloodless. His eyes are piercing gray

deep set, with large projecting eyebrows. His mouth is wide and massive, the expression of the smile hard, cold—even sardonic. The forehead is broad, with prominent organs of ideality; a good deal bald; the hair thin and grayish, as are also the whiskers, which he wears in a simple style. His bearing is quite distinguished, full of the aristocracy of intellect. In general, he looks in better health than before his last visit to England. He seems active—physically and morally energetic. His dress is plain to the extreme of simplicity, although of late there is a certain degree of Anglicism about it.

In character no man stands more loftily than Bryant. The peculiarly melancholy expression of his countenance has caused him to be accused of harshness, or coldness of heart. Never was there a greater mistake. His soul is charity itself, in all respects generous and noble. His manners are undoubtedly reserved.

Of late days he has nearly, if not altogether abandoned literary pursuits, although still editing, with unabated vigor, "The New York Evening Post." He is married, (Mrs. Bryant still living,) has two daughters, (one of them Mrs. Parke Godwin,) and is residing for the present at Vice-Chancellor McCown's, near the junction of Warren and Church streets.—I have thought that these brief personal details of one of the most justly celebrated men in America might not prove uninteresting to some of the readers of "The Lady's Book."

1846

LONGFELLOW'S BALLADS

In our last number we had some hasty observation on these "Ballads"—observations which we now pro pose, in some measure, to amplify and explain.

It may be remembered that, among other points, w demurred to Mr. Longfellow's *theses,* or rather t their general character. We found fault with the to obtrusive nature of their *didacticism.* Some yea ago we urged a similar objection to one or two o the longer pieces of Bryant; and neither time nor re flection has sufficed to modify, in the slightest pa ticular, our convictions upon this topic.

We have said that Mr. Longfellow's conception o the *aims* of poesy is erroneous; and that thus, labo ing at a disadvantage he does violent wrong to his ow high powers; and now the question is, what *are* his idea of the aims of the muse, as we gather these ideas fro the *general* tendency of his poems? It will be once evident that, imbued with the peculiar spirit o German song (a pure conventionality) he regards th inculcation of a *moral* as essential. Here we find necessary to repeat that we have reference only to th *general* tendency of his compositions; for there a some magnificent exceptions, where, as if by accide he has permitted his genius to get the better of h conventional prejudice. But didacticism is the pre

alent *tone* of his song. His invention, his imagery, his all, is made subservient to the elucidation of some one or more points (but rarely of more than one) which he looks upon as *truth.* And that this mode of procedure will find stern defenders should never excite surprise, so long as the world is full to overflowing with cant and conventicles. There are men who will scramble on all fours through the muddiest sloughs of vice to pick up a single apple of virtue. There are things called men who, so long as the sun rolls, will greet with snuffing huzzas every figure that takes upon itself the semblance of truth, even though the figure, in itself only a "stuffed Paddy," be as much out of place as a toga on the statue of Washington, or out of season as rabbits in the days of the dog-star.

Now with as deep a reverence for "the true" as ever inspired the bosom of mortal man, we would limit, in many respects, its modes of inculcation. We would limit to enforce them. We would not render them impotent by dissipation. The demands of truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All that is indispensable in song is all with which she has nothing to do. To deck her in gay robes is to render her a harlot. It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreathe her in gems and flowers. Even in stating this our present proposition, we verify our own words —we feel the necessity, in enforcing this *truth,* of descending from metaphor. Let us then be simple and distinct. To convey "the true" we are required to dimiss from the attention all inessentials. We must be perspicuous, precise, terse. We need concentration rather than expansion of mind. We must be calm,

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unimpassioned, unexcited—in a word, we must be in that peculiar mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who cannot perceive the radical and chasmal difference between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be grossly wedded to conventionalisms who, in spite of this difference, shall still attempt to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its most obvious and immediately recognizable distinctions, we have the pure intellect, taste, and the moral sense. We place *taste* between the intellect and the moral sense, because it is just this intermediate space which, in the mind, it occupies. It is the connecting link in the triple chain.

It serves to sustain a mutual intelligence between the extremes. It appertains, in strict appreciation, to the former, but is distinguished from the latter by so faint a difference, that Aristotle has not hesitated to class some of its operations among the Virtues themselves. But the *offices* of the trio are broadly marked. Just as conscience, or the moral sense, recognizes duty, just as the intellect deals with *truth;* so is it the part of taste alone to inform us of BEAUTY. And Poesy is the handmaiden but of Taste. Yet we would not be misunderstood. This handmaiden is not forbidden to moralize—in her own fashion. She is not forbidden to depict—but to reason and preach, of virtue. As of this latter, conscience recognizes the obligation, so intellect teaches the expediency, while taste contents herself with displaying the beauty: waging war with vice merely on the ground of its inconsistency with

itness, harmony, proportion—in a word with τὸ καλόν [the beautiful].

An important condition of man's immortal nature s thus, plainly, the sense of the Beautiful. This it is vhich ministers to his delight in the manifold forms nd colors and sounds and sentiments amid which he xists. And, just as the eyes of Amaryllis are re-eated in the mirror, or the living lily in the lake, so s the mere *record* of these forms and colors and ounds and sentiments—so is their mere oral or written epetition a duplicate source of delight. But this rep-tition is not Poesy. He who shall merely sing with vhatever rapture, in however harmonious strains, or vith however vivid a truth of imitation, of the sights nd sounds which greet him in common with all man-ind—he, we say, has yet failed to prove his divine itle. There is still a longing unsatisfied, which he as been impotent to fulfil. There is still a thirst nquenchable, which to allay he has shown us no crystal prings. This burning thirst belongs to the *immortal* ssence of man's nature. It is equally a consequence nd an indication of his perennial life. It is the desire f the moth for the star. It is not the mere appreciation f the beauty before us. It is a wild effort to reach ne beauty above. It is a forethought of the loveli-ess to come. It is a passion to be satiated by no ıblunary sights, or sounds, or sentiments, and the oul thus athirst strives to allay its fever in futile fforts at *creation*. Inspired with a prescient ecstasy f the beauty beyond the grave, it struggles by multi-orm novelty of combination among the things and houghts of Time, to anticipate some portion of that

loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertai
solely to Eternity. And the result of such effort, o
the part of souls fittingly constituted, is alone wha
mankind have agreed to denominate Poetry.

We say this with little fear of contradiction. Ye
the spirit of our assertion must be more heeded tha
the letter. Mankind have *seemed* to define Poesy i
a thousand, and in a thousand conflicting definition
But the war is one only of words. Induction is as we
applicable to this subject as to the most palpable an
utilitarian; and by its sober processes we find that, i
respect to compositions which have been really receive
as poems, the *imaginative,* or, more popularly, th
creative portions *alone* have ensured them to be s
received. Yet these works, on account of these por
tions, having once been so received and so named,
has happened, naturally and inevitably, that other por
tions totally unpoetic have not only come to be re
garded by the popular voice as poetic, but have bee
made to serve as false standards of perfection, in th
adjustment of other poetical claims. Whatever ha
been found in whatever has been received as a poem
has been blindly regarded as *ex statu* poetic. An
this is a species of gross error which scarcely coul
have made its way into any less intangible topic. I
fact that license which appertains to the Muse hersel
it has been thought decorous, if not sagacious to in
dulge, in all examination of her character.

Poesy is thus seen to be a response—unsatisfactor
it is true—but still in some measure a response, to
natural and irrepressible demand. Man being wha
he is, the time could never have been in which Poes

was not. Its first element is the thirst for supernal BEAUTY—a beauty which is not afforded the soul by any existing collocation of earth's forms—a beauty which, perhaps, *no possible* combination of these forms would fully produce. Its second element is the attempt to satisfy this thirst by *novel* combinations, *of those combinations which our predecessors, toiling in chase of the same phantom, have already set in order.* We thus clearly deduce the *novelty,* the *originality,* the *invention,* the *imagination,* or lastly the *creation* of BEAUTY, (for the terms as here employed are synonymous) as the essence of all Poesy. Nor is this idea so much at variance with ordinary opinion as, at first sight, it may appear. A multitude of antique dogmas on this topic will be found, when divested of extrinsic speculation, to be easily resoluble into the definition now proposed. We do nothing more than present tangibly the vague clouds of the world's idea. We recognize the idea itself floating, unsettled, indefinite, in every attempt which has yet been made to circumscribe the conception of "Poesy" in words. A striking instance of this is observable in the fact that no definition exists, in which either "the beautiful," or some one of those qualities which we have above designated synonymously with "creation," has not been pointed out as the *chief* attribute of the Muse. "Invention," however, or "imagination," is by far more commonly insisted upon. The word ποίησις itself (creation) speaks volumes upon this point. Neither will it be amiss here to mention Count Bielfeld's definition of poetry as *"L'art d'exprimer les pensées par la fiction."* With this definition (of which the philosophy is profound to a

certain extent) the German terms *Dichtkunst,* the a
of fiction, and *Dichten,* to feign, which are used f
"poetry" and *"to make verses,"* are in full and r
markable accordance. It is, nevertheless, in the *co*
bination of the two omni-prevalent ideas that t
novelty and, we believe, the force of our own propos
tion is to be found.

So far, we have spoken of Poesy as of an abstracti
alone. As such, it is obvious that it may be applicab
in various moods. The sentiment may develop itse
in Sculpture, in Painting, in Music, or otherwise. B
our present business is with its development in wor
—that development to which, in practical acceptation, t
world has agreed to limit the term. And at this poi
there is one consideration which induces us to paus
We cannot make up our minds to admit (as some ha
admitted) the inessentiality of rhythm. On the co
trary, the universality of its use in the earliest poetic
efforts of mankind would be sufficient to assure u
not merely of its congeniality with the Muse, or
its adaptation to her purposes, but of its elementa
and indispensable importance. But here we mus
perforce, content ourselves with mere suggestion; f
this topic is of a character which would lead us t
far. We have already spoken of Music as one of t
moods of poetical development. It is in Music, pe
haps, that the soul most nearly attains that end up
which we have commented—the creation of supern
beauty. It may be, indeed, that this august aim is he
even partially or imperfectly attained, *in fact.* T
elements of that beauty which is felt in sound, *may*
the mutual or common heritage of Earth and Heave

n the soul's struggles at combinations it is thus not npossible that a harp may strike notes not unfamiliar) the angels. And in this view the wonder may well e less that all attempts at defining the character or entiment of the deeper musical impressions, has been ound absolutely futile. Contenting ourselves, there- ore, with the firm conviction, that music (in its modi- cations of rhythm and rhyme) is of so vast a moment n Poesy, as *never* to be neglected by him who is truly oetical—is of so mighty a force in furthering the great im intended that he is mad who rejects its assistance —content with this idea we shall not pause to main- in its absolute essentiality, for the mere sake of ounding a definition. We will but add, at this point, iat the highest possible development of the Poetical entiment is to be found in the union of song with usic, in it popular sense. The old Bards and Min- esingers possessed, in the fullest perfection, the finest nd truest elements of Poesy; and Thomas Moore, nging his own ballads, is but putting the final touch) their completion as poems.

To recapitulate, then, we would define in brief the oetry of words as the *Rhythmical Creation of Beauty.* eyond the limits of Beauty its province does not ex- nd. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or ith the Conscience it has only collateral relations. It is no dependence, unless incidentally, upon either uty or *Truth.* That our definition will necessarily xclude much of what, through a supine toleration, has therto ranked as poetical, is a matter which affords not even momentary concern. We address but the oughtful, and heed only their approval—with our

own. If our suggestions are truthful, then "after many days" shall they be understood as truth, even though found in contradiction of *all* that has been hitherto so understood. If false shall we not be the first to bid them die?

We would reject, of course, all such matters as "Armstrong on Health," a revolting production; Pope's "Essay on Man," which may well be content with the title of an "Essay in Rhyme," "Hudibras," and other merely humorous pieces. We do not gainsay the peculiar merits of either of these latter compositions—but deny them the position held. In a notice, month before last, of Brainard's Poems, we took occasion to show that the common use of a certain instrument (rhythm) had tended, more than aught else, to confound humorous verse with poetry. The observation is now recalled to corroborate what we have just said in respect to the vast effect or force of melody in itself—an effect which could elevate into even momentary confusion with the highest efforts of mind, compositions such as are the greater number of satires or burlesques.

Of the poets who have appeared most fully instinct with the principles now developed, we may mention *Keats* as the most remarkable. He is the sole British poet who has never erred in his themes. Beauty is always his aim.

We have thus shown our ground of objection to the general *themes* of Professor Longfellow. In common with all who claim the sacred title of poet, he should limit his endeavors to the creation of novel moods of beauty, in form, in color, in sound, in sentiment; for

over all this wide range has the poetry of words dominion. To what the world terms *prose* may be safely and properly left all else. The artist who doubts of his thesis, may always resolve his doubt by the single question—"might not this matter be as well or better handled in *prose?*" If it *may,* then is it no subject for the Muse. In the general acceptation of the term *Beauty* we are content to rest; being careful only to suggest that, in our peculiar views, it must be understood as inclusive of the *sublime.*

Of the pieces which constitute the present volume, there are not more than one or two thoroughly fulfilling the idea above proposed; although the volume as a whole is by no means so chargeable with didacticism as Mr. Longfellow's previous book. We would mention as poems *nearly true,* "The Village Blacksmith"; "The Wreck of the Hesperus" and especially "The Skeleton in Armor." In the first-mentioned we have the *beauty* of simple-mindedness as a genuine thesis; and this thesis is inimitably handled until the concluding stanza, where the spirit of legitimate poesy is aggrieved in the pointed antithetical deduction of a *moral* from what has gone before. In "The Wreck of the Hesperus" we have the *beauty* of child-like confidence and innocence, with that of the father's stern courage and affection. But, with slight exception, those particulars of the storm here detailed are not poetic subjects. Their thrilling *horror* belongs to prose, in which it could be far more effectively discussed, as Professor Longfellow may assure himself at any moment by experiment. There *are* points of a tempest which afford the loftiest and truest poetical

themes—points in which pure beauty is found, or, be
ter still, beauty heightened into the sublime, by terro
But when we read, among other similar things, th

> The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
> The salt tears in her eyes,

we feel, if not positive disgust, at least a chilling sen
of the inappropriate. In "The Skeleton in Armor" w
find a pure and perfect thesis artistically treated. W
find the beauty of bold courage and self-confidence,
love and maiden devotion, of reckless adventure, a
finally of life-contemning grief. Combined with
this, we have numerous *points* of beauty apparent
insulated, but all aiding the main effect or impressio
The heart is stirred, and the mind does not lament
mal-instruction. The metre is simple, sonorous, wel
balanced, and fully adapted to the subject. Upon t
whole, there are few truer poems than this. It has b
one defect—an important one. The prose remar
prefacing the narrative are really *necessary*. But eve
work of art should contain within itself all that is re
uisite for its own comprehension. And this rema
is especially true of the ballad. In poems of magnitu
the mind of the reader is not, at all times, enabled
include, in one comprehensive survey, the proportio
and proper adjustment of the whole. He is please
if at all, with particular passages; and the sum of h
pleasure is compounded of the sums of the pleasu
able sentiments inspired by these individual passag
in the progress of perusal. But, in pieces of less e
tent, the pleasure is *unique*, in the proper acceptation
this term—the understanding is employed, witho

difficulty, in the contemplation of the picture *as a whole;* and thus its effect will depend, in great measure, upon the perfection of its finish, upon the nice adaptation of its constituent parts, and especially, upon what is rightly termed by Schlegel *the unity or totality of interest.* But the practice of prefixing explanatory passages is utterly at variance with such unity. By the prefix, we are either put in possession of the subject of the poem, or some hint, historic fact, or suggestion, is thereby afforded, not included in the body of the piece, which, without the hint, is incomprehensible. In the latter case, while perusing the poem, the reader must revert, in mind at least, to the prefix, for the necessary explanation. In the former, the poem being a mere paraphrase of the prefix, the interest is divided between the prefix, and the paraphrase. In either instance the totality of effect is destroyed.

Of the other original poems in the volume before us, there is none in which the aim of instruction, or *truth,* has not been too obviously substituted for the legitimate aim, *beauty.* In our last number, we took occasion to say that a didactic moral might be happily made the *under-current* of a poetical theme, and in "Burton's Magazine," some two years since, we treated this point at length, in a review of Moore's "Alciphron"; but the moral thus conveyed is invariably an ill effect when obtruding beyond the upper current of the thesis itself. Perhaps the worst specimen of this obtrusion is given us by our poet in "Blind Bartimeus" and the "Goblet of Life," where, it will be observed that the *sole* interest of the upper-current of meaning depends upon its relation or reference to the under. What we read

upon the surface would be *vox et preterea nihi*
[sound without sense] in default of the moral be-
neath. The Greek *finales* of "Blind Bartimeus" are
an affectation altogether inexcusable. What the small
second-hand, Gibbon-ish pedantry of Byron introduced
is unworthy the imitation of Longfellow.

Of the translations we scarcely think it necessary
to speak at all. We regret that our poet will persist
in busying himself about such matters. *His* time
might be better employed in original conception. Most
of these versions are marked with the error upon which
we have commented. This error is in fact, essentially
Germanic. "The Luck of Edenhall," however, is a
truly beautiful poem; and we say this with all that def-
erence which the opinion of the "Democratic Review"
demands. This composition appears to us *one of the*
very finest. It has all the free, hearty, *obvious* move-
ment of the true ballad-legend. The greatest force of
language is combined in it with the richest imagination
acting in its most legitimate province. Upon the whole
we prefer it even to the "Sword-Song" of Körner.
The pointed moral with which it terminates is so ex-
ceedingly natural—so perfectly fluent from the in-
cidents—that we have hardly heart to pronounce it in
ill taste. We may observe of this ballad, in conclu-
sion, that its subject is more *physical* than is usual in
Germany. Its images are rich rather in physical than
in moral beauty. And this tendency, in Song, is the
true one. It is chiefly, if we are not mistaken—it is
chiefly amid forms of physical loveliness (we use the
word *forms* in its widest sense as embracing modifica-
tions of sound and color) that the soul seeks the realiza-

tion of its dreams of BEAUTY. It is to her demand in this sense especially, that the poet, who is wise, will most frequently and most earnestly respond.

"The Children of the Lord's Supper" is, beyond doubt, a true and most beautiful poem in great part, while, in some particulars, it is too metaphysical to have any pretension to the name. We have already objected, briefly, to its metre—the ordinary Latin or Greek Hexameter—dactyls and spondees at random, with a spondee in conclusion. We maintain that the Hexameter can never be introduced into our language, from the nature of that language itself. This rhythm demands, *for English ears,* a preponderance of natural spondees. Our tongue has few. Not only does the Latin and Greek, with the Swedish, and some others, abound in them; but the Greek and Roman ear had become reconciled (why or how is unknown) to the reception of artificial spondees—that is to say, spondaic words formed partly of one word and partly of another, or from an excised part of one word. In short, the ancients were content to read *as they scanned,* or nearly so. It may be safely prophesied that we shall never do this; and thus we shall never admit English Hexameters. The attempt to introduce them, after the repeated failures of Sir Philip Sidney, and others, is, perhaps, somewhat discreditable to the scholarship of Professor Longfellow. The "Democratic Review," in saying that he has triumphed over difficulties in this rhythm, has been deceived, it is evident, by the facility with which some of these verses may be read. In glancing over the poem, we do not observe a single verse which can be read, *to English Ears, as a Greek*

hexameter. There are many, however, which can b well read as mere English dactylic verses; such, for ex ample, as the well known lines of Byron, commencin

Know ye the | land where the | cypress and | myrtle.

These lines (although full of irregularities) are, i their perfection, formed of three dactyls and a cæsur —just as if we should cut short the initial verse o the Bucolics thus—

Tityre | tu patu | læ recu | bans—

"The "myrtle," at the close of Byron's line, is double rhyme, and must be understood as one syllabl

Now a great number of Professor Longfellow hexameters are merely these dactylic lines, *continue for two feet.* For example—

Whispered the | race of the | flowers and | merry on balancing | branches.

In this example, also, "branches," which is a doubl ending, must be regarded as the cæsura, or one syllabl of which alone it has the force.

As we have already alluded, in one or two regard to a notice of these poems which appeared in th "Democratic Review," we may as well here proce with some few further comments upon the article question—with whose general tenor we are happy agree.

The Review speaks of "Maidenhood" as a poe "not to be understood but at the expense of more tim and trouble than a song can justly claim." We a

scarcely less surprised at this opinion from Mr. Langtree than we were at the condemnation of "The Luck of Edenhall."

"Maidenhood" is faulty, it appears to us, only on the score of its theme, which is somewhat didactic. Its *meaning* seems simplicity itself. A maiden on the verge of womanhood, hesitating to enjoy life (for which she has a strong appetite) through a false idea of duty, is bidden to fear nothing, having purity of heart as her lion of Una.

What Mr. Langtree styles "an unfortunate peculiarity" in Mr. Longfellow, resulting from "adherence to a false system" has really been always regarded by us as one of his idiosyncratic merits. "In each poem," says the critic, "he has but *one* idea, which, in the the progress of his song, is gradually unfolded, and at last reaches its full development in the concluding lines; this singleness of thought might lead a harsh critic to suspect intellectual barrenness." It leads *us,* individually, only to a full sense of the artistical power and knowledge of the poet. We confess that now, for the first time, we hear unity of conception objected to as a defect. But Mr. Langtree seems to have fallen into the singular error of supposing the poet to have absolutely *but one idea* in each of his ballads. Yet how "one idea" can be "gradually unfolded" without other ideas, is, to us, a mystery of mysteries. Mr. Longfellow, very properly, has but one *leading* idea which forms the basis of his poem; but to the aid and development of this one there are innumerable others, of which the rare excellence is, that all are in keeping, that none could be well omitted, that each tends to the

one general effect. It is unnecessary to say anothe word upon this topic.

In speaking of "Excelsior," Mr. Langtree (are w wrong in attributing the notice to his very forcibl pen?) seems to labor under some similar misconcep tion. "It carries along with it," says he, "a fals moral which greatly diminishes its merit in our eyes The great merit of a picture, whether made with th pencil or pen, is its *truth;* and this merit does no belong to Mr. Longfellow's sketch. Men of geniu may, and probably do, meet with greater difficultie in their struggles with the world than their fellowme who are less highly gifted; but their power of over coming obstacles is proportionably greater, and th result of their laborious suffering is not death but im mortality."

That the chief merit of a picture is its *truth,* is a assertion deplorably erroneous. Even in Painting which is, more essentially than Poetry, a mimetic ar the proposition cannot be sustained. Truth is not eve *the aim.* Indeed it is curious to observe how ver slight a degree of truth is sufficient to satisfy the mind which acquiesces in the absence of numerous essential in the thing depicted. An outline frequently stirs th spirit more pleasantly than the most elaborate pictur We need only refer to the compositions of Flaxma and of Retzch. Here all details are omitted—nothin can be farther from *truth.* Without even color th most thrilling effects are produced. In statues we ar rather pleased than disgusted with *the want of the ey ball.* The hair of the Venus de Medicis *was gilde* Truth indeed! The grapes of Zeuxis as well as th

curtain of Parrhasius were received as indisputable evidence of the truthful ability of these artists—but they were not even *classed among their pictures*. If truth is the highest aim of either Painting or Poesy, then Jan Steen was a greater artist than Angelo, and Crabbe is a more noble poet than Milton.

But we have not quoted the observations of Mr. Langtree to deny its philosophy; our design was simply to show that he has misunderstood the poet. "Excelsior" has not even a remote tendency to the interpretation assigned it by the critic. It depicts the *earnest upward impulse of the soul*—an impulse not to be subdued even in Death. Despising danger, resisting pleasure, the youth, bearing the banner inscribed *"Excelsior!"* (higher still!) struggles through all difficulties to an Alpine summit. Warned to be content with the elevation attained, his cry is still *"Excelsior!"* And, even in falling dead on the highest pinnacle, his cry is *still "Excelsior!"* There is yet an immortal height to be surmounted—an ascent in Eternity. The poet holds in view the idea of never-ending *progress*. That he is misunderstood is rather the misfortune of Mr. Langtree than the fault of Mr. Longfellow. There is an old adage about the difficulty of one's furnishing an auditor both with matter to be comprehended and brains for its comprehension.

1842

LOWELL'S "A FABLE FOR CRITICS"

What have we Americans accomplished in the way of Satire? "The Vision of Rubeta," by Laughton Osborn, is probably our best composition of the kind: but, in saying this, we intend no excessive commendation. Trumball's clumsy and imitative work is scarcely worth mention; and then we have Halleck's "Croakers," local and ephemeral; but what is there besides? Park Benjamin has written a clever address, with the title "Infatuation," and Holmes has an occasional scrap, piquant enough in its way; but we can think of nothing more that can be fairly called "satire." Some matters we have produced, to be sure, which were excellent in the way of burlesque—the "Poems" of William Ellery Channing, for example—without meaning a syllable that was not utterly solemn and serious. Odes, ballads, songs, sonnets, epics, and epigrams, possessed of this unintentional excellence, we should have no difficulty in designating by the dozen; but in the particular of direct and obvious satire, it cannot be denied that we are unaccountably deficient.

It has been suggested that this deficiency arises from the want of a suitable field for satirical display. In England, it is said, satire abounds, because the people there find a proper target in the aristocracy, whom they (the people) regard as a distinct race with whom they have little in common; relishing even the most virulent

abuse of the upper classes with a gusto undiminished by any feeling that they (the people) have any concern in it. In Russia, or Austria, on the other hand, it is urged, satire is unknown; because there is danger in touching the aristocracy, and self-satire would be odious to the mass. In America, also, the people who write are, it is maintained, the people who read; thus in satirizing the people we satirize only ourselves, and are never in condition to sympathize with the satire.

All this is more verisimilar than true. It is forgotten that no individual considers himself as one of the mass. Each person, in his own estimate, is the pivot on which all the rest of the world spins round. We may abuse *the people* by wholesale, and yet with a clear conscience, so far as regards any compunction for offending any one from among the multitude of which that "people" is composed. Every one of the crowd will cry *"Encore!*—give it to them, the vagabonds!—it serves them right." It seems to us that, in America, we have refused to encourage satire—not because what we have had touches us too nearly—but because it has been too pointless to touch us at all. Its namby-pambyism has arisen, in part, from the general want, among our men of letters, of that minute *polish,* of that skill in details, which, in combination with natural sarcastic power, satire, more than any other form of literature, so imperatively demands. In part, also, we may attribute our failure to the colonial sin of imitation. We content ourselves, at this point not less supinely than at all others, with doing what not only has been done before, but what, however well done, has yet been done *ad nauseam.* We should not be able to endure infinite repetitions of

even absolute excellence; but what is "McFingal" more than a faint echo from "Hudibras"?—and what is "The Vision of Rubeta" more than a vast gilded swill-trough overflowing with "Dunciad" and water? Although we are not all Archilochuses, however—although we have few pretensions to the ἰχηέντες ἴαμβοι [flowing iambics]—although, in short, we are no satirists ourselves—there can be no question that we answer sufficiently well as subjects for satire.

"The Vision" is bold enough, if we leave out of sight its anonymous issue, and bitter enough, and witty enough, if we forget its pitiable punning on names, and long enough (Heaven knows) and well constructed and decently versified; but it fails in the principal element of all satire—*sarcasm*—because the *intention* to be sarcastic (as in the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," and in all the more classical satires) is permitted to render itself manifest. The malevolence *appears*. The author is never very severe, because he is at no time particularly cool. We laugh not so much at his victims as at himself, for letting them put him in such a passion. And where a deeper sentiment than mirth is excited—where it is pity or contempt that we are made to feel—the feeling is too often reflected, in its object, from the satirized to the satirist—with whom we sympathize in the discomfort of his animosity. Mr. Osborn has not many superiors in downright invective; but this is the awkward left arm of the satiric Muse. *That* satire alone is worth talking about which at least *appears* to be the genial, good-humored outpouring of irrepressible merriment.

"The Fable for the Critics" just issued, has not the

name of its author on the title-page; and but for some slight foreknowledge of the literary opinions, likes, dislikes, whims, prejudices and crotchets of Mr. *James Russell Lowell,* we should have had much difficulty in attributing so very *loose* a brochure to *him.* The "Fable" is essentially "loose"—ill-conceived and feebly executed, as well in detail as in general. Some good hints and some sparkling witticisms do not serve to compensate us for its rambling plot (if plot it can be called) and for the want of artistic finish so particularly noticeable throughout the work—especially in its versification. In Mr. Lowell's prose efforts we have before observed a certain *disjointedness,* but never, until now, in his verse; and we confess some surprise at his putting forth so unpolished a performance. The author of "The Legend of Brittany" (which is decidedly the noblest poem, of the same length, written by an American) could not do a better thing than to take the advice of those who mean him well, in spite of his fanaticism, and leave prose, with satiric verse, to those who are better able to manage them; while he contents himself with that class of poetry for which, and for which alone, he seems to have an especial vocation—the poetry of *sentiment.* This, to be sure, is *not* the very loftiest order of verse; for it is far inferior to either that of the imagination or that of the passions; but it is the loftiest region in which Mr. Lowell can get his breath without difficulty.

Our primary objection to this "Fable for the Critics" has reference to a point which we have already touched in a general way. "The malevolence appears." We laugh not so much at the author's victims as at himself, for letting them put him in such a passion. The very

title of the book shows the want of a due sense in respect to the satirical essence, *sarcasm*. This "fable"—this severe lesson—is meant *"for Critics."* "Ah!" we say to ourselves at once—"we see how it is. Mr. Lowell is a poor devil poet, and some critic has been reviewing him, and making him feel very uncomfortable; whereupon, bearing in mind that Lord Byron, when similarly assailed, avenged his wrongs in a satire which he called 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,' he (Mr. Lowell) imitative as usual, has been endeavoring to get redress in a parallel manner—by a satire with a parallel title—'A Fable for the Critics.'"

All this the reader says to himself; and all this tells *against* Mr. Lowell in two ways—first, by suggesting unlucky comparisons between Byron and Lowell, and secondly, by reminding us of the various criticisms in which we have been amused (rather ill-naturedly) at seeing Mr. Lowell "used up."

The title starts us on this train of thought, and the satire sustains us in it. Every reader versed in our literary gossip, is at once put *dessous des cartes* [in possession of the secret] as to the particular provocation which engendered the "Fable." Miss Margaret Fuller, some time ago, in a silly and conceited piece of Transcendentalism, which she called an "Essay on American Literature," or something of that kind, had the consummate pleasantry, after *selecting* from the list of American poets, *Cornelius Mathews and William Ellery Channing,* for especial commendation, to speak of *Longfellow* as a booby, and of *Lowell* as so wretched a poet as to be disgusting even to his best friends." All this Miss Fuller *said,* if not in our precise words, still

in words quite as much to the purpose. *Why* she said it, Heaven only knows—unless it was because she was Margaret Fuller, and wished to be taken for nobody else. Messrs. Longfellow and Lowell, so pointedly picked out for abuse as the *worst* of our poets, are, upon the whole, perhaps, our best—although Bryant, and one or two others are scarcely inferior As for the two favorites, selected just as pointedly for laudation, by Miss Fuller—it is really difficult to think of them, in connexion with poetry, without laughing. Mr. Mathews once wrote some sonnets "On Man," and Mr. Channing some lines on "A Tin Can," or something of that kind; and if the former gentleman be not the very worst poet that ever existed on the face of the earth, it is only because he is not quite so bad as the latter. To speak algebraically:—Mr. Mathews is *ex*ecrable, but Mr. Channing is x plus I-ecrable.

Mr. Lowell has obviously aimed his "Fable" at Miss Fuller's head, in the first instance, with an eye to its ricocheting so as to knock down Mr. Mathews in the second. Miss Fuller is introduced as Miss F——, rhyming to "cooler," and afterwards as "Miranda"; while poor Mr. Mathews is brought in upon all occasions, head and shoulders; and now and then a sharp thing, although never very original, is said *of* them or *at* them; but all the true satiric *effect* wrought, is that produced by the satirist against himself. The reader is all the time smiling to think that so unsurpassable a—(*what* shall we call her?—we wish to be civil,) a transcendentalist as Miss Fuller, should, by *such* a criticism, have had the power to put a respectable poet in *such* a passion.

As for the plot or conduct of this "Fable," the less we say of it the better. It is so weak, so flimsy, so ill put together, as to be not worth the trouble of understanding:—something, as usual, about Apollo and Daphne. Is there *no* originality on the face of the earth? Mr. Lowell's total want of it is shown at all points—very especially in his preface of rhyming verse written without distinction by lines or initial capitals (a hackneyed matter, originating, we believe, with Frazer's Magazine), very especially also, in his long continuations of some particular rhyme—a fashion introduced, if we remember aright, by Leigh Hunt, more than twenty-five years ago, in his "Feast of the Poets," which by the way, has been Mr. Lowell's model in many respects.

Although ill-temper has evidently engendered this "Fable," it is by no means a satire throughout. Much of it is devoted to panegyric; but our readers would be quite puzzled to know the grounds of the author's laudations, in many cases, unless made acquainted with a fact which we think it as well they should be informed of at once. Mr. Lowell is one of the most rabid of the Abolition fanatics; and no Southerner who does not wish to be insulted, and at the same time revolted by a bigotry the most obstinately blind and deaf, should ever touch a volume by this author.[1] His fanaticism about

[1] This "Fable *for the Critics*"—this *literary* satire—this benevolent *jeu d'esprit* is disgraced by such passages as the following:

> Forty fathers of Freedom, of whom twenty bred
> Their sons for the rice swamps at so much a head,
> And their daughters for—faugh!

slavery is a mere local outbreak of the same innate wrong-headedness which, if he owned slaves, would manifest itself in atrocious ill-treatment of them, with murder of any abolitionist who should endeavor to set them free. A fanatic of Mr. Lowell's species, is simply a fanatic for the sake of fanaticism, and *must* be a fanatic in whatever circumstances you place him.

His prejudices on the topic of slavery break out everywhere in his present book. Mr. Lowell has not the common honesty to speak well, even in a literary sense, of any man who is not a ranting abolitionist. With the exception of Mr. Poe, (who has written some commendatory criticisms on his poems,) no Southerner is mentioned *at all* in this "Fable." It is a fashion among Mr. Lowell's set to affect a belief that there is *no such thing* as Southern Literature. Northerners—people who have really nothing to speak of as men of letters, —are cited by the dozen, and lauded by this candid critic without stint, while Legaré, Simms, Longstreet, and others of equal note are passed by in contemptuous silence. Mr. Lowell cannot carry his frail honesty of opinion even so far South as New York. All whom he praises are Bostonians. Others writers are barbarians, and satirized accordingly, if mentioned at all.

To show the general *manner* of the Fable, we quote a portion of what he says about Mr. Poe:

> Here comes Poe with his Raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
> Three-fifths of him genius, and two-fifths sheer fudge,
> Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,
> In a way to make all men of common sense d—n metres,
> Who has written some things far the best of their kind,
> But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind.

We may observe here that *profound* ignorance o any particular topic is always sure to manifest itsel by some allusion to "common sense" as an all-sufficien instructor. So far from Mr. Poe's talking "like book" on the topic at issue, his chief purpose has bee to demonstrate that there exists *no* book on the subjec worth talking *about;* and "common sense," after al has been the basis on which *he* relied, in contradistinc tion from the *un*common nonsense of Mr. Lowell an the small pedants.

And now let us see how far the unusual "commo sense" of our satirist has availed him in the structur of his verse. First, by way of showing what his *in tention* was, we quote three accidentally accurat lines:—

> But a boy | he could ne | ver be right | ly defined.
> As I said | he was ne | ver precise | ly unkind.
> But as Ci | cero says | he won't say | this or that.

Here it is clearly seen that Mr. Lowell intends a lin of four anapæsts. (An anapæst is a foot composed o two short syllables followed by a long.) With th observation, we will now simply copy a few of th lines which constitute the body of the poem; askin any of our readers to *read them if they can;* that is t say, we place the question, without argument, on th broad basis of the very commonest "common sense."

> They're all from one source, monthly, weekly, diurnal. . .
> Disperse all one's good and condense all one's poor traits. . .
> The one's two-thirds Norseman, the other half Greek. . .
> He has imitators in scores who omit. . . .

Should suck milk, strong-will-giving brave, such as runs. . . .
Along the far rail-road the steam-snake glide white. . . .
From the same runic type-fount and alphabet. . . .
Earth has six truest patriots, four discoverers of ether. . . .
Every cockboat that swims clears its fierce (pop) gundeck at him. . . .
Is some of it pr—— no, 'tis not even prose. . . .
O'er his principles, when something else turns up trumps. . . .
But a few silly-(syllo I mean) gisms that squat 'em. . . .
Nos, we don't want extra freezing in winter. . . .
Plough, dig, sail, forge, build, carve, paint, make all over new.

But enough:—we have given a fair specimen of the *general* versification. It might have been better—but we are quite sure that it *could not have been worse.* So much for "common sense," in Mr. Lowell's understanding of the term. Mr. Lowell should not have meddled with the anapæstic rhythm: it is exceedingly awkward in the hands of one who knows nothing about it and who *will* persist in fancying that he can write it by ear. Very especially he should have avoided this rhythm in satire, which, more than any other branch of Letters, is dependent upon seeming trifles for its effect. Two-thirds of the force of the "Dunciad" may be referred to its exquisite finish; and had "The Fable for the Critics" been, (what it is *not,*) the quintessence of the satiric spirit itself, it would nevertheless, in so slovenly a form, have failed. As it is, no failure was ever more complete or more pitiable. By the publication of a book at once so ambitious and so feeble, so malevolent in design and so harmless in execution, a work so roughly and clumsily yet so weakly constructed,

so very different, in body and spirit, from anything that he has written before, Mr. Lowell has committed an irrevocable *faux pas* and lowered himself at least fifty per cent in the literary public opinion.

1849

WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

In speaking of Mr. William Ellery Channing, who has just published a very neat little volume of poems, we feel the necessity of employing the indefinite rather than the definite article. He is *a,* and by no means *the,* William Ellery Channing. He is only *the son* of the great essayist deceased. He is just such a person, in despite of his *clarum et venerabile nomen,* as Pindar would have designated by the significant term τις [a certain fellow]. It may be said in his favor that nobody ever heard of him. Like an honest woman, he has aways succeeded in keeping himself from being made the subject of gossip. His book contains about sixty-three things, which he calls poems, and which he no doubt seriously supposes so to be. They are full of all kinds of mistakes, of which the most important is that of their having been printed at all. They are not precisely English—nor will we insult a great nation by calling them Kickapoo; perhaps they are Channingese. We may convey some general idea of them by two foreign terms not in common use—the Italian *pavoneggiarsi,* "to strut like a peacock," and the German word for "sky-rocketing," *schwärmerei.* They are more preposterous, in a word, than any poems except those of the author of "Sam Patch"; for we presume we are right (are we not?) in taking it for granted that

the author of "Sam Patch" is the very worst of all the wretched poets that ever existed upon earth.

In spite, however, of the customary phrase about a man's "making a fool of himself," we doubt if any one was ever a fool of his own free will and accord. A poet, therefore, should not always be taken too strictly to task. He should be treated with leniency, and, even when damned, should be damned with respect. Nobility of descent, too, should be allowed its privileges not more in social life than in letters. The son of a great author cannot be handled too tenderly by the critical Jack Ketch. Mr. Channing must be hung, that's true. He must be hung *in terrorem*—and for this there is no help under the sun; but then we shall do him all manner of justice, and observe every species of decorum, and be especially careful of his feelings, and hang him gingerly and gracefully, with a silken cord, as the Spaniards hang their grandees of the blue blood, their nobles of the *sangre azula*.

To be serious, then; as we always wish to be if possible. Mr. Channing (whom we suppose to be a *very* young man, since we are precluded from supposing him a *very* old one,) appears to have been inoculated, at the same moment, with *virus* from Tennyson and from Carlyle. And here we do not wish to be misunderstood. For Tennyson, as for a man imbued with the richest and rarest poetic impulses, we have an admiration—a reverence unbounded. His "Morte D'Arthur," his "Locksley Hall," his "Sleeping Beauty," his "Lady of Shalott," his "Lotos Eaters," his "Ænone," and many other poems, are not surpassed, in all that gives to poetry its distinctive value, by the compositions of any

one living or dead. And his leading error—that error which renders him unpopular—a point, to be sure, of no particular importance—that very error, we say, is founded in truth, in a keen perception of the elements of poetic beauty. We allude to his quaintness, to what the world chooses to term his affectation. No true poet, no critic whose approbation is worth even a copy of the volume we now hold in our hand, will deny that he feels impressed, sometimes even to tears, by many of those very affectations which he is impelled by the prejudice of his education, or by the cant of his reason, to condemn. He should thus be led to examine the extent of the one, and to be wary of the deductions of the other. In fact, the profound intuition of Lord Bacon has supplied, in one of his immortal apothegms, the whole philosophy of the point at issue. "There is no exquisite beauty," he truly says, "without some *strangeness* in its proportions." We maintain, then, that Tennyson errs, not in his occasional quaintness, but in its continual and obtrusive excess. And, in accusing Mr. Channing of having been inoculated with *virus* from Tennyson, we merely mean to say that he has adopted and exaggerated that noble poet's characteristic defect, having mistaken it for his principal merit.

Mr. Tennyson is quaint only; he is never, as some have supposed him, obscure, except, indeed, to the uneducated, whom he does not address. Mr. Carlyle, on the other hand, is obscure only; he is seldom, as some have imagined him, quaint. So far he is right; for although quaintness, employed by a man of judgment and genius, may be made auxiliary to a *poem,* whose true thesis is beauty, and beauty alone, it is grossly, and even

ridiculously, out of place in a work of prose. But in his obscurity it is scarcely necessary to say that he is wrong. Either a man intends to be understood, or he does not. If he write a book which he intends *not* to be understood, we shall be very happy indeed not to understand it; but if he write a book which he means to be understood, and, in this book, be at all possible pains to prevent us from understanding it, we can only say that he is an ass—and this, to be brief, is our private opinion of Mr. Carlyle, which we now take the liberty of making public.

It seems that having deduced, from Tennyson and Carlyle, an opinion of the sublimity of everything odd, and of the profundity of everything meaningless, Mr. Channing has conceived the idea of setting up for himself as a poet of *unusual* depth, and *very* remarkable powers of mind. His airs and graces, in consequence, have a highly picturesque effect, and the Boston critics who have a notion that poets are porpoises, (for they are always talking about their running in "schools,") cannot make up their minds as to what particular school he must belong. *We* say the Bobby Button school, by all means. He clearly belongs to that. And should nobody ever have heard of the Bobby Button school, that is a point of no material importance. We will answer for it, as it is one of our own. Bobby Button is a gentleman with whom, for a long time, we have had the honor of an intimate acquaintance. His personal appearance is striking. He has quite a big head. His eyes protrude and have all the air of saucers. His chin retreats. His mouth is depressed at the corners. He wears a perpetual frown of contemplation. His words

are slow, emphatic, few, and oracular. His "thes," "ands," and "buts," have more meaning than other men's polysyllables. His nods would have put Burleigh's to the blush. His whole aspect, indeed, conveys the idea of a gentleman modest to a fault, and painfully overburthened with intellect. We insist, however, upon calling Mr. Channing's school of poetry the Bobby Button school, rather because Mr. Channing's poetry is strongly suggestive of Bobby Button, than because Mr. Button himself ever dallied, to any very great extent, with the Muses. With the exception, indeed, of a *very* fine "Sonnet to a Pig"—or rather the fragment of a sonnet, for he proceeded no farther than the words "*O* piggy wiggy," with the *O* italicized for emphasis—with the exception of this, we say, we are not aware of his having produced anything worthy of that stupendous genius which is certainly *in* him, and only wants, like the starling of Sterne, "to get out."

The best passage in the book before us, is to be found at page 121, and we quote it, as a matter of simple justice, in full:

> Dear friend, in this fair atmosphere again,
> Far from the noisy echoes of the main,
> Amid the world-old mountains, and the hills
> From whose strange grouping a fine power distills
> The soothing and the calm, I seek repose,
> The city's noise forgot and hard stern woes.
> As thou once said'st, the rarest sons of earth
> Have in the dust of cities shown their worth,
> Where long collision with the human curse
> Has of great glory been the frequent nurse,
> *And only those who in sad cities dwell*
> *Are of the green trees fully sensible.*

To them the silver bells of tinkling streams
Seem brighter than an angel's laugh in dreams.

The four lines italicized are highly meritorious, and the whole extract is so far decent and intelligible, that we experienced a feeling of surprise upon meeting it amid the doggerel which surrounds it. Not less was our astonishment upon finding, at page 18, a fine thought so well embodied as the following:

Or see the early stars, a mild sweet train,
Come out to bury the diurnal sun.

But, in the way of commendation, we have now done. We have carefully explored the whole volume in vain, for a single additional line worth even the most qualified applause.

The utter *abandon*—the charming *negligé*—the perfect looseness (to use a western phrase) of his rhythm, is one of Mr. C.'s most noticeable, and certainly one of his most refreshing traits. It would be quite a pleasure to hear him read or scan, or to hear anybody else read or scan, such a line as this, at page 3, for example:—

Masculine almost though softly carv'd in grace,

where "masculine" has to be read as a trochee, and "almost" as an iambus; or this, at page 8:—

That compels me on through wood, and fell, and moor,

where "that compels" has to be pronounced as equivalent to the iambus "me on"; or this, at page 18:

I leave thee, *the* maid spoke to *the* true youth,

where both the *"thes"* demand a strong accent to preserve the iambic rhythm; or this, at page 29:

So in our steps strides truth and honest trust,

where (to say nothing of the grammar, which *may* be Dutch, but is not English) it is quite impossible to get through with the "step strides truth" without dislocating the under jaw; or this, at page 32:

The *se*rene azure. *The* keen stars are now;

or this, on the same page:

Some*times* of sorrow, joy, to *thy* Fu*ture;*

or this, at page 56:

Harsh action, even in repose inwardly harsh;

or this, at page 59:

Provides am*plest* enjoyment. O my brother;

or this, at page 138:

Like the swift petrel, mimicking the wave's measure

About all of which the less we say the better.

At page 96, we read thus:

Where the untrammelled soul on her wind pinions,
Fearlessly sweeping, defies my earthly foes,
There, there upon that infinitest sea
Lady, thy hope, so fair a hope, summons me.

At page 51, we have it thus:

The river calmly flows
Through shining banks, thro' lonely glen

Where the owl shrieks, tho' ne'er the cheer of men
Has stirred its mute repose;
Still if you should walk there you would go there again.

At page 136, we read as follows:

Tune thy clear voice to no funereal song,
For O Death stands to welcome thee sure.

At page 116, he has this:

These graves, you mean;
Their histo*ry* who knows bet*ter* than I?
For in the busy street strikes on my ear
Each sound, even inaudible voices
Lengthen the long tale my memory tells.

Just below, on the same page, he has

I see but little difference tru*ly;*

and at page 76 he fairly puts the climax to metrical absurdity in the lines which follow:

The spirit builds his house in *the* least flowers—
A beautiful mansion; how the colors live,
Int*ri*cately de*li*cate!

This is to be read, of course, intrikkittly delikkit, and "intrikkittly delikkit" it is—unless, indeed, we are very especally mistaken.

The affectations—the Tennysonisms of Mr. Channing—pervade his book at all points, and are not easily particularized. He employs, for example, the word "delight" for "delighted"; as at page 2:

Delight to trace the mountain-brook's descent.

He uses, also, all the prepositions in a different sense from the rabble. If, for instance, he was called upon to say "on," he wouldn't say it by any means, but he'd say "off," and endeavor to make it answer the purpose. For "to," in the same manner, he says "from"; for "with," "of," and so on: at page 2, for example:

> Nor less in winter, mid the glittering banks
> Heaped *of* unspotted snow, the maiden roved.

For "serene," he says "s*e*rene"; as at page 4:

> The influences of this s*e*rene isle.

For "subdued," he says "*sub*dued": as at page 16:

> So full of thought, so *sub*dued to bright fears.

By the way, what kind of fears *are* bright?

For "eternal," he says "eterne": as at page 30:

> Has risen, *and* an eterne sun now paints.

For "friendless," he substitutes "friend*less";* as at page 31:

> Are drawn in other figures. Not friend*less.*

To "future," he prefers "fu*ture":* as at page 32:

> Sometime of sorrow. Joy to thy fu*ture.*

To "azure," in the same way, he prefers "a*zure":* as at page 46:

> Ye stand each separate in the a*zure.*

In place of "unheard," he writes "*un*heard": as thus, at page 47:

> Or think, tho' *un*heard, that your sphere is dumb.

In place of "perchance," he writes "*per*chance": as at page 71:

> When *per*chance sorrow with her icy smile.

Instead of "more infinite," he writes "infi*nit*er," with an accent on the "nit," as thus, at page 100:

> Hope's child, I summon infi*nit*er powers.

And here we might as well ask Mr. Channing, in passing, what idea he attaches to infinity, and whether he really thinks that he is at liberty to subject the adjective "infinite" to degrees of comparison. Some of these days we shall hear, no doubt, of "eternal, eternaler, and eternalest."

Our author is quite enamoured of the word "sumptuous," and talks about "sumptuous trees" and "sumptuous girls," with no other object, we think, than to employ the epithet at all hazards and upon all occasions. He seems unconscious that it means nothing more than expensive, or costly; and we are not quite sure that either trees or girls are, in America, either the one or the other.

For "loved" Mr. C. prefers to say "was loving," and takes great pleasure in the law phrase "the same." Both peculiarities are exemplified at page 20, where he says:

> The maid was loving this enamoured same.

He is fond also, of inversions and contractions, and employs them in a very singular manner. At page 15 he has:

> Now may I thee describe a Paradise.

At page 86 he says:

> Thou lazy river, flowing neither way
> Me figurest, and yet thy banks seem gay.

At page 143 he writes:

> Men change that Heaven above not more;

meaning that men change so much that Heaven above does not change more. At page 150 he says:

> But so much soul hast thou within thy form
> Than luscious summer days thou art the more;

by which he would imply that the lady has so much soul within her form that she is more luscious than luscious summer days.

Were we to quote specimens under the general head of "utter and irredeemable nonsense," we should quote nine-tenths of the book. Such nonsense, we mean, as the following, from page 11:

> I hear thy solemn anthem fall,
> Of richest song upon my ear,
> That clothes thee in thy golden pall
> As this wide sun flows on the mere.

Now let us translate this: He hears (Mr. Channing,) a solemn anthem, of richest song, fall upon his ear, and this anthem clothes the individual who sings it in

that individual's golden pall, in the same manner that, or at the time when, the wide sun flows on the mere—which is all very delightful, no doubt.

At page 37, he informs us that,

> It is not living,
> To a soul believing,
> To change each noble joy,
> Which our strength employs,
> For a state half rotten
> And a life of toys,

And that it is

> Better to be forgotten
> Than lose equipoise.

And we dare say it is, if one could only understand what kind of equipoise is intended. It is better to be forgotten, for instance, than to lose one's equipoise on the top of a shot tower.

Occupying the whole of page 88, he has the six lines which follow, and we will present any one (the author not excepted,) with a copy of the volume, if any one will tell us what they are all about:

> He came and waved a little silver wand,
> He dropped the veil that hid a statue fair,
> He drew a circle with that pearly hand,
> His grace confin'd that beauty in the air,
> Those limbs so gentle now at rest from flight,
> Those quiet eyes now musing on the night.

At page 102, he has the following:—

> Dry leaves with yellow ferns, they are
> Fit wreath of Autumn, while a star
> Still, bright, and pure, our frosty air

Shivers in twinkling points
Of thin celestial hair
And thus one side of Heaven anoints.

This we think we can explain. Let us see. Dry leaves, mixed with yellow ferns, are a wreath fit for autumn at the time when our frosty air shivers a still, bright, and pure star with twinkling points of thin celestial hair, and with this hair, or hair plaster, anoints one side of the sky. Yes—this is it—no doubt.

At page 123, we have these lines:

My sweet girl is lying still
In her lovely atmosphere;
The gentle hopes her blue veins fill
With pure silver warm and clear.

O see her hair, O mark her breast!
Would it not, *O!* comfort thee,
If thou couldst nightly go to rest
By that virgin chastity?

Yes; we think, upon the whole, it would. The eight lines are entitled a "Song," and we should like very much to hear Mr. Channing sing it.

Pages 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 41, are filled with short "Thoughts" in what Mr. Channing supposes to be the manner of Jean Paul. One of them runs thus:

How shall I live? In earnestness.
What shall I do? Work earnestly.
What shall I give? A willingness.
What shall I gain? Tranquility.
But do you mean a quietness
In which I act and no man bless?
Flash out in action infinite and free,
Action conjoined with deep tranquility,

> Resting upon the soul's true utterance,
> And life shall flow as merry as a dance.

All our readers will be happy to hear, we are sure, that Mr. Channing is going "to flash out." Elsewhere at page 97, he expresses very similar sentiments:

> My empire is myself and I defy
> The external; yes, I rule the whole or die!

It will be observed here, that Mr. Channing's empire is himself, (a small kingdom, however,) that he intends to defy "the external," whatever that is—perhaps he means the infernal—and that, in short, he is going to rule the whole or die; all which is very proper indeed, and nothing more than we have to expect from Mr. Channing.

Again, at page 146, he is rather fierce than otherwise. He says:

> We surely were not meant to ride the sea,
> Skimming the wave in that so prisoned small,
> Reposing our infinite faculties utterly.
> Boom like a roaring sunlit waterfall.
> Humming to infinite abysms: speak loud, speak free!

Here Mr. Channing not only intends to "speak loud and free" himself, but advises everybody else to do likewise. For his own part, he says, he is going to "*boom*"—"to hum and to boom"—to "hum like a roaring waterfall," and "boom to an infinite abysm." What in the name of Belzebub, *is* to become of us all?

At page 39, while indulging in similar bursts of fervor and of indignation, he says:

Thou meetest a common man
With a delusive show of *can,*

and this passage we quote by way of instancing what we consider the only misprint in the book. Mr. Channing could never have meant to say:

Thou meetest a common man
With a delusive show of *can;*

for what *is* a delusive show of *can?* No doubt it should have been,

Thou meetest a little pup
With a delusive show of tin-cup.

A can, we believe, is a tin-cup, and the cup must have been tied to the tail of the pup. Boys *will* do such tricks, and there is no earthly way of preventing them, we believe, short of cutting off their heads—or the tails of the pups.

And this remarkable little volume is, after all, by William Ellery Channing. A great name it has been said, is, in many cases, a great misfortune. We hear daily complaints from the George Washington Dixons, the Socrates Smiths, and the Napoleon Buonaparte Joneses, about the inconsiderate ambition of their parents and sponsors. By inducing invidious comparison, these *prænomina* get their bearers (so they say) into every variety of scrape. If George Washington Dixon, for example, does not think proper, upon compulsion, to distinguish himself as a patriot, he is considered a very singular man; and Socrates Smith is never brought up before his honor the Mayor without receiving a double allowance of thirty days; while his honor the

Mayor can assign no sounder reason for his severity, than that better things than getting toddied are to be expected of Socrates. Napoleon Buonaparte Jones, on the other hand, to say nothing of being called Nota Bene Jones by all his acquaintance, is cowskinned, with perfect regularity, five times a month, merely because people *will* feel it a point of honor to cowskin a Napoleon Buonaparte.

And yet these gentlemen—the Smiths and the Joneses—are wrong *in toto,* as the Smiths and the Joneses invariably are. They are wrong, we say, in accusing their parents and sponsors. They err in attributing their misfortunes and persecutions to the *prænomina*—to the names assigned them at the baptismal font. Mr. Socrates Smith does not receive his double quantum of thirty days because he is called Socrates, but because he is called Socrates *Smith.* Mr. Napoleon Buonaparte Jones is not in the weekly receipt of a flogging on account of being Mr. Napoleon Buonaparte, but simply on account of being Mr. Napoleon Buonaparte *Jones.* Here, indeed, is a clear distinction. It is the surname which is to blame, after all. Mr. Smith must drop the Smith. Mr. Jones should discard the Jones. No one would ever think of taking Socrates—Socrates solely—to the watchhouse; and there is not a bully living who would venture to cowskin Napoleon Buonaparte *per se.* And the reason is plain. With nine individuals out of ten, as the world is at present happily constituted, Mr. Socrates (without the Smith) would be taken for the veritable philosopher of whom we have heard so much and Mr. Napoleon Buonaparte (without the Jones) would be received implicitly as the hero of Aus-

terlitz. And should Mr. Napoleon Buonaparte (without the Jones) give an opinion upon military strategy, it would be heard with the profoundest respect. And should Mr. Socrates (without the Smith) deliver a lecture or write a book, what critic so bold as not to pronounce it more luminous than the logic of Emerson, and more profound than the Orphicism of Alcott. In fact, both Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones, in the case we have imagined, would derive through their own ingenuity, a very material advantage. But no such ingenuity has been needed in the case of Mr. William Ellery Channing, who has been befriended by Fate, or the foresight of his sponsors, and who has *no* Jones or Smith at the end of his name.

And here, too, a question occurs. There are many people in the world silly enough to be deceived by appearances. There are individuals so crude in intellect —so *green,* (if we may be permitted to employ a word which answers our purpose much better than any other in the language,) so green, we say, as to imagine, in the absence of any indication to the contrary, that a volume bearing upon its title-page the name of William Ellery Channing, must necessarily be the posthumous work of that truly illustrious author, the *sole* William Ellery Channing of whom anybody in the world ever heard. There are a vast number of uninformed young persons prowling about our book-shops, who will be raw enough to buy, and even to read half through this pretty little book (God preserve and forgive them!) mistaking it for the composition of another. But what then? Are not books made, as well as razors, to sell? The poet's name *is* William Ellery Channing—is it *not?*

And if a man has not a right to the use of his own name, to the use of what has he a right? And could the poet have reconciled it to his conscience to have injured the sale of his own volume by any uncalled-for announcement upon the title-page, or in a preface, to the effect that he is not his father, but only his father's very intelligent son? To put the case more clearly by reference to our old friends, Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones. Is either Mr. Smith, when mistaken for Socrates, or Mr. Jones, when accosted as Napoleon, bound, by any conceivable species of honor, to inform the whole world—the one, that he is not Socrates, but only Socrates Smith; the other, that he is by no means Napoleon Buonaparte, but only Napoleon Buonaparte Jones? 1843

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

In the preface to my sketches of New York Literati, while speaking of the broad distinction between the seeming public and real private opinion respecting our authors, I thus alluded to Nathaniel Hawthorne:

> For example, Mr. Hawthorne, the author of "Twice-Told Tales," is scarcely recognized by the press or by the public, and when noticed at all, is noticed merely to be damned by faint praise. Now, my opinion of him is, that although his walk is limited and he is fairly to be charged with mannerism, treating all subjects in a similar tone of dreamy *innuendo,* yet in this walk he evinces extraordinary genius, having no rival either in America or elsewhere; and this opinion I have never heard gainsaid by any one literary person in the country. That this opinion, however, is a spoken and not a written one, is referable to the facts, first, that Mr. Hawthorne is a poor man, and, secondly, that he is *not* an ubiquitous quack.

The reputation of the author of "Twice-Told Tales" has been confined, indeed, until very lately, to literary society; and I have not been wrong, perhaps, in citing him as *the* example, *par excellence,* in this country, of the privately-admired and publicly-unappreciated man of genius. Within the last year or two, it is true, an occasional critic has been urged, by honest indignation, into very warm approval. Mr. Webber, for instance, (than whom no one has a keener relish for that kind

of writing which Mr. Hawthorne has best illustrated,) gave us, in a late number of "The American Review," a cordial and certainly a full tribute to his talents; and since the issue of the "Mosses from an Old Manse," criticisms of similar tone have been by no means infrequent in our more authoritative journals. I can call to mind few reviews of Hawthorne published *before* the "Mosses." One I remember in "Arcturus" (edited by Matthews and Duyckinck) for May, 1841; another in the "American Monthly" (edited by Hoffman and Herbert) for March, 1838; a third in the ninety-sixth number of the "North American Review." These criticisms, however, seemed to have little effect on the popular taste—at least, if we are to form any idea of the popular taste by reference to its expression in the newspapers, or by the sale of the author's book. It was never the fashion (until lately) to speak of him in any summary of our best authors. The daily critics would say, on such occasions, "Is there not Irving and Cooper, and Bryant and Paulding, and—Smith?" or, "Have we not Halleck and Dana, and Longfellow and —Thompson?" or, "Can we not point triumphantly to our own Sprague, Willis, Channing, Bancroft, Prescott and—Jenkins?" but these unanswerable queries were never wound up by the name of Hawthorne.

Beyond doubt, this inappreciation of him on the part of the public arose chiefly from the two causes to which I have referred—from the facts that he is neither a man of wealth nor a quack;—but these are insufficient to account for the whole effect. No small portion of it is attributable to the very marked idiosyncrasy of Mr. Hawthorne himself. In one sense, and in great

measure, to be peculiar is to be original, and than the true originality there is no higher literary virtue. This true or commendable originality, however, implies not the uniform, but the continuous peculiarity—a peculiarity springing from ever-active vigor of fancy—better still if from ever-present force of imagination, giving its own hue, its own character to everything it touches, and, especially, *self impelled to touch everything.*

It is often said, inconsiderately, that very original writers always fail in popularity—that such and such persons are too original to be comprehended by the mass. "Too peculiar," should be the phrase, "too idiosyncratic." It is, in fact, the excitable, undisciplined and child-like popular mind which most keenly feels the original. The criticism of the conservatives, of the hackneys, of the cultivated old clergymen of the "North American Review," is precisely the criticism which condemns and alone condemns it. "It becometh not a divine," saith Lord Coke, "to be a fiery and salamandrine spirit." Their conscience allowing them to move nothing themselves, these dignitaries have a holy horror of being moved. "Give us *quietude,*" they say. Opening their mouths with proper caution, they sigh forth the word *"Repose."* And this is, indeed, the only thing they should be permitted to enjoy, if only upon the Christian principle of give and take.

The fact is, that if Mr. Hawthorne were really original, he could not fail of making himself felt by the public. But the fact is, he is *not* original in any sense. Those who speak of him as original, mean nothing more than that he differs in his manner or tone, and in his choice of subjects, from any author

of their acquaintance—their acquaintance not extending to the German Tieck, whose manner, in *some* of his works, is absolutely identical with that *habitual* to Hawthorne. But it is clear that the element of the literary originality is novelty. The element of its appreciation by the reader is the reader's sense of the new. Whatever gives him a new and insomuch a pleasurable emotion, he considers original, and whoever frequently gives him such emotion, he considers an original writer. In a word, it is by the sum total of these emotions that he decides upon the writer's claim to originality. I may observe here, however, that there is clearly a point at which even novelty itself would cease to produce the legitimate originality, if we judge this originality, as we should, by the effect designed; this point is that at which *novelty becomes nothing novel;* and here the artist, *to preserve his originality* will subside into the commonplace. No one, I think, has noticed that, merely through inattention to this matter, Moore has comparatively failed in his "Lalla Rookh." Few readers, and indeed few critics, have commended this poem for originality—and, in fact, the effect, originality, is not produced by it—yet no work of equal size so abounds in the happiest originalities, individually considered. They are so excessive as, in the end, to deaden in the reader all capacity for their appreciation.

These points properly understood, it will be seen that the critic (unacquainted with Tieck) who reads a single tale or essay by Hawthorne, may be justified in thinking him original; but the tone, or manner, or choice of subject, which induces in this critic the sense

of the new, will—if not in a second tale, at least in a third and all subsequent ones—not only fail of inducing it, but bring about an exactly antagonistic impression. In concluding a volume, and more especially in concluding all the volumes of the author, the critic will abandon his first design of calling him "original," and content himself with styling him "peculiar."

With the vague opinion that to be original is to be unpopular, I could, indeed, agree, were I to adopt an understanding of originality which, to my surprise, I have known adopted by many who have a right to be called critical. They have limited, in a love for mere words, the literary to the metaphysical originality. They regard as original in letters, only such combinations of thought, of incident, and so forth, as are, in fact, absolutely novel. It is clear, however, not only that it is the novelty of *effect* alone which is worth consideration, but that this effect is *best* wrought, for the end of all fictitious composition, pleasure, by shunning rather than by seeking the absolute novelty of combination. Originality, thus understood, tasks and startles the intellect, and so brings into undue action the faculties to which, in the lighter literature, we least appeal. And thus understood, it cannot fail to prove unpopular with the masses, who, seeking in this literature amusement, are positively offended by instruction. But the true originality—true in respect of its purposes—is that which, in bringing out the half-formed, the reluctant, or the unexpressed fancies of mankind, or in exciting the more delicate pulses of the heart's passion, or in giving birth to some universal sentiment or instinct in embryo, thus combines with the pleasurable effect of

apparent novelty, a real egotistic delight. The reader, in the case first supposed, (that of the absolute novelty,) is excited, but embarrassed, disturbed, in some degree even pained at his own want of perception, at his own folly in not having himself hit upon the idea. In the second case, his pleasure is doubled. He is filled with an intrinsic and an extrinsic delight. He feels and intensely enjoys the seeming novelty of the thought, enjoys it as really novel, as absolutely original with the writer—*and himself*. They two, he fancies, have alone of all men, thought thus. They two have, together, created this thing. Henceforward there is a bond of sympathy between them—a sympathy which irradiates every subsequent page of the book.

There is a species of writing which, with some difficulty, may be admitted as a lower degree of what I have called the true original. In its perusal we say to ourselves, not "how original this is!" nor "here is an idea which I and the author have alone entertained," but "here is a charmingly obvious fancy," or sometimes even, "here is a thought which I am not sure has ever occurred to myself, but which, of course, has occurred to all the rest of the world." This kind of composition (which still appertains to a high order) is usually designated as "the natural." It has little external resemblance, but strong internal affinity to the true original, if, indeed, as I have suggested, it is not of this latter an inferior degree. It is best exemplified, among English writers, in Addison, Irving and *Hawthorne*. The "ease" which is so often spoken of as its distinguishing feature, it has been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone, as a point of

really difficult attainment. This idea, however, must be received with some reservation. The natural style is difficult only to those who should never intermeddle with it—to the unnnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct that the *tone,* in composition, should be that which, at any given point or upon any given topic, would be the tone of the great mass of humanity. The author who, after the manner of the North Americans, is merely at *all* times *quiet,* is, of course, upon *most* occasions, merely silly or stupid, and has no more right to be thought "easy" or "natural" than has a cockney exquisite, or the sleeping Beauty in the wax-works.

The "peculiarity," or sameness, or monotone of Hawthorne, would, in its mere character of "peculiarity," and without reference to what *is* the peculiarity, suffice to deprive him of all chance of popular appreciation. But at his failure to be appreciated, we can, *of course,* no longer wonder, when we find him monotonous at decidely the worst of all possible points—at that point which, having the least concern with Nature, is the farthest removed from the popular intellect, from the popular sentiment, and from the popular taste. I allude to the strain of allegory which completely overwhelms the greater number of his subjects, and which in some measure interferes with the direct conduct of absolutely all.

In defence of allegory, (however, or for whatever object, employed,) there is scarcely one respectable word to be said. Its best appeals are made to the fancy—that is to say, to our sense of adaptation, not of matters proper, but of matters improper for the

purpose, of the real with the unreal; having never more of intelligible connexion than has something with nothing, never half so much of effective affinity as has the substance for the shadow. The deepest emotion aroused within us by the happiest allegory, *as* allegory, is a very, very imperfectly satisfied sense of the writer's ingenuity in overcoming a difficulty we should have preferred his not having attempted to overcome. The fallacy of the idea that allegory, in any of its moods, can be made to enforce a truth—that metaphor, for example, may illustrate as well as embellish an argument—could be prompty demonstrated; the converse of the supposed fact might be shown, indeed, with very little trouble—but these are topics foreign to my present purpose. One thing is clear, that if allegory ever establishes a fact, it is by dint of overturning a fiction. Where the suggested meaning runs through the obvious one in a *very* profound under-current, so as never to interfere with the upper one without our own volition, so as never to show itself unless *called* to the surface, there only, for the proper uses of fictitious narrative, is it available at all. Under the best circumstances, it must always interfere with that unity of effect which, to the artist, is worth all the allegory in the world. Its vital injury, however, is rendered to the most vitally important point in fiction—that of earnestness or verisimilitude. That "The Pilgrim's Progress" is a ludicrously over-rated book, owing its seeming popularity to one or two of those accidents in critical literature which by the critical are sufficiently well understood, is a matter upon which no two thinking people

disagree; but the pleasure derivable from it, in any sense, will be found in the direct ratio of the reader's capacity to smother its true purpose, in the direct ratio of his ability to keep the allegory out of sight, or of his *in*ability to comprehend it. Of allegory properly handled, judiciously subdued, seen only as a shadow or by suggestive glimpses, and making its nearest approach to truth in a not obtrusive and therefore not unpleasant *appositeness,* the "Undine" of De La Motte Fouqué is the best, and undoubtedly a very remarkable specimen.

The obvious causes, however, which have prevented Mr. Hawthorne's *popularity,* do not suffice to condemn him in the eyes of the few who belong properly to books, and to whom books, perhaps, do not quite so properly belong. These few estimate an author, not as do the public, altogether by what he does, but in great measure—indeed, even in the greatest measure—by what he evinces a capability of doing. In this view, Hawthorne stands among literary people in America much in the same light as did Coleridge in England. The few, also, through a certain warping of the taste, which long pondering upon books as books merely never fails to induce, are not in condition to view the errors of a scholar as errors altogether. At any time these gentlemen are prone to think the public not right rather than an educated author wrong. But the simple truth is, that the writer who aims at impressing the people, is *always* wrong when he fails in forcing that people to receive the impression. How far Mr. Hawthorne has addressed the people at all, is, of course, not a

question for me to decide. His books afford strong internal evidence of having been written to himself and his particular friends alone.

There has long existed in literature a fatal and unfounded prejudice, which it will be the office of this age to overthrow—the idea that the mere bulk of a work must enter largely into our estimate of its merit. I do not suppose even the weakest of the Quarterly reviewers weak enough to maintain that in a book's size or mass, abstractly considered, there is anything which especially calls for our admiration. A mountain, simply through the sensation of physical magnitude which it conveys, does indeed, affect us with a sense of the sublime, but we cannot admit any such influence in the contemplation even of "The Columbiad." The Quarterlies themselves will not admit it. And yet, what else are we to understand by their continual prating about "sustained effort"? Granted that this sustained effort has accomplished an epic—let us then admire the effort, (if this be a thing admirable,) but certainly not the epic on the effort's account. Common sense, in the time to come, may possibly insist upon measuring a work of art rather by the object it fulfils, by the impression it makes, than by the time it took to fulfil the object, or by the extent of "sustained effort" which became necessary to produce the impression. The fact is, that perseverance is one thing and genius quite another; nor can all the transcendentalists in Heathendom confound them.

Full of its bulky ideas, the last number of the "North American Review," in what it imagines a criticism on Simms, "honestly avows that it has little opinion of the

ıere tale"; and the honesty of the avowal is in no light degree guaranteed by the fact that this Review as never yet been known to put forth an opinion vhich was *not* a very little one indeed.

The tale proper affords the fairest field which can be fforded by the wide domains of mere prose, for the xercise of the highest genius. Were I bidden to say ow this genius could be most advantageously em-loyed for the best display of its powers, I should nswer, without hesitation, "in the composition of a hymed poem not to exceed in length what might e perused in an hour." Within this limit alone can ıe noblest order of poetry exist. I have discussed ıis topic elsewhere, and need here repeat only that ıe phrase "a long poem" embodies a paradox. A oem must intensely excite. Excitement is its prov-ıce, its essentiality. Its value is in the ratio of its elevating) excitement. But all excitement is, from psychal necessity, transient. It cannot be sustained ırough a poem of great length. In the course of an our's reading, at most, it flags, fails; and then the oem is, in effect, no longer such. Men admire, but re wearied with the "Paradise Lost"; for platitude ollows platitude, *inevitably,* at regular interspaces, the depressions between the waves of excitement) ntil the poem, (which, properly considered, is but a uccession of brief poems,) having been brought to an ıd, we discover that the sums of our pleasure and of ispleasure have been very nearly equal. The absolute, ltimate or aggregate effect of any epic under the sun , for these reasons, a nullity. "The Iliad," in its orm of epic, has but an imaginary existence; granting

it real, however, I can only say of it that it is based on a primitive sense of Art. Of the modern epic nothing can be so well said as that it is a blindfold imitation of a "come-by-chance." By and by these propositions will be understood as self-evident, and in the meantime will not be essentially damaged as truths by being generally condemned as falsities.

A poem *too* brief, on the other hand, may produce a sharp or vivid, but never a profound or enduring impression. Without a certain continuity, without a certain duration or repetition of the cause, the soul is seldom moved to the effect. There must be the dropping of the water on the rock. There must be the pressing steadily down of the stamp upon the wax. De Béranger has wrought brilliant things, pungent and spirit-stirring, but most of them are too immassive to have *momentum,* and, as so many feathers of fancy, have been blown aloft only to be whistled down the wind. Brevity, indeed, may degenerate into epigrammatism, but this danger does not prevent extreme length from being the one unpardonable sin.

Were I called upon, however, to designate that class of composition which, next to such a poem as I have suggested, should best fulfil the demands and serve the purposes of ambitious genius, should offer it the most advantageous field of exertion, and afford it the fairest opportunity of display, I should speak at once of the brief prose tale. History, philosophy, and other matters of that kind, we leave out of the question, of course. *Of course,* I say, and in spite of the graybeards. These grave topics, to the end of time, will be best illustrated by what a discriminating world, turn-

ing up its nose at the drab pamphlets, has agreed to understand as *talent*. The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons analogous to those which render length objectionable in the poem. As the novel cannot be read at one sitting, it cannot avail itself of the immense benefit of *totality*. Worldly interests, intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, counteract and annul the impressions intended. But simple cessation in reading would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out his full design without interruption. During the hour of perusal, the soul of the reader is at the writer's control.

A skillful artist has constructed a tale. He has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having deliberately conceived a certain *single effect* to be wrought, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, and discusses them in such tone as may best serve him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very first sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then in his very first step has he committed a blunder. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preestablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale, its thesis, has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed—an end absolutely demanded, yet, in the novel, altogether unattainable.

Of skillfully-constructed tales—I speak now without

reference to other points, some of them more important than construction—there are very few American specimens. I am acquainted with no better one, upon the whole, than the "Murder Will Out" of Mr. Simms, and this has some glaring defects. The "Tales of a Traveler," by Irving, are graceful and impressive narratives—"The Young Italian" is especially good—but there is not one of the series which can be commended as a whole. In many of them the interest is subdivided and frittered away, and their conclusions are insufficiently *climacic*. In the higher requisites of composition, John Neal's magazine stories excel—I mean in vigor of thought, picturesque combination of incident, and so forth—but they ramble too much, and invariably break down just before coming to an end, as if the writer had received a sudden and irresistible summons to dinner, and thought it incumbent upon him to make a finish of his story before going. One of the happiest and best-sustained tales I have seen is "Jack Long; or, The Shot in the Eye," by Charles W. Webber, the assistant editor of Mr. Colton's "American Review." But in general skill of construction, the tales of Willis, I think, surpass those of any American writer—with the exception of Mr. Hawthorne.

I must defer to the better opportunity of a volume now in hand, a full discussion of his individual pieces, and hasten to conclude this paper with a summary of his merits and demerits.

He is peculiar and *not* original—unless in those detailed fancies and detached thoughts which his want of general originality will deprive of the appreciation due to them, in preventing them forever reaching the

ublic eye. He is infinitely too fond of allegory, and an never hope for popularity so long as he persists n it. This he will not do, for allegory is at war with ne whole tone of his nature, which disports itself never o well as when escaping from the mysticism of his Goodman Browns and White Old Maids into the hearty, enial, but still Indian-summer sunshine of his Wakefelds and Little Annie's Rambles. Indeed, *his* spirit f "metaphor run-mad" is clearly imbibed from the halanx and phalanstery atmosphere in which he has een so long struggling for breath. He has not half ne material for the exclusiveness of authorship that he ossesses for its universality. He has the purest style, ne finest taste, the most available scholarship, the ost delicate humor, the most touching pathos, the most adiant imagination, the most consummate ingenuity; nd with these varied good qualities he has done *well* s a mystic. But is there any one of these qualities hich should prevent his doing doubly as well in a areer of honest, upright, sensible, prehensible and omprehensible things? Let him mend his pen, get a ottle of visible ink, come out from the Old Manse, ut Mr. Alcott, hang (if possible) the editor of "The ial," and throw out of the window to the pigs all his dd numbers of "The North American Review."

1847

COOPER'S "WYANDOTTÉ"

"Wyandotté, or The Hutted Knoll," is, in its genera features, precisely similar to the novels enumerated i the title [*The Pathfinder; Deerslayer; Last of th Mohicans; Pioneers; Prairie*]. It is a forest subject and, when we say this, we give assurance that the stor is a good one; for Mr. Cooper has never been know to fail, either in the forest or upon the sea. The in terest, as usual, has no reference to *plot,* of which indeed, our novelist seems altogether regardless, o incapable, but depends, first, upon the nature of th theme; secondly, upon a Robinson-Crusoe-like detail i its management; and, thirdly, upon the frequently re peated portraiture of the half-civilized Indian. In say ing that the interest depends, *first,* upon the natur of the theme, we mean to suggest that this theme— life in the wilderness—is one of intrinsic and universa interest, appealing to the heart of man in all phases a theme, like that of life upon the ocean, so unfailingl omniprevalent in its power of arresting and absorbin attention that, while success or popularity is, with suc a subject, expected as a matter of course, a failur might be properly regarded as conclusive evidence o imbecility on the part of the author. The two these in question have been handled *usque ad nauseam* [wit nauseating frequency]—and this through the instinc

tive perception of the universal interest which appertains to them. A writer, distrustful of his powers, can scarcely do better than discuss either one or the other. A man of genius will rarely, and should never, undertake either: first, because both are excessively hackneyed; and, secondly, because the reader never fails, in forming his opinion of a book, to make discount, either wittingly or unwittingly, for that intrinsic interest which is inseparable from the subject and independent of the manner in which it is treated. Very few and very dull, indeed, are those who do not instantaneously perceive the distinction; and thus there are two great classes of fictions: a popular and widely circulated class, read with pleasure, but without admiration, in which the author is lost or forgotten, or remembered, if at all, with something very nearly akin to contempt; and then, a class not so popular nor so widely diffused, in which, at every paragraph, arises a distinctive and highly pleasurable interest, springing from our perception and appreciation of the skill employed, or the genius evinced in the composition. After perusal of the one class, we think solely of the book; after reading the other, chiefly of the author. The former class leads to popularity, the latter to fame. In the former case, the books sometimes live, while the authors usually die; in the latter, even when the works perish, the man survives. Among American writers of the less generally circulated, but more worthy and more artistical fictions, we may mention Mr. Brockden Brown, Mr. John Neal, Mr. Simms, Mr. Hawthorne; at the head of the more popular division we may place Mr. Cooper.

"The Hutted Knoll," without pretending to detai facts, gives a narrative of fictitious events, similar, i nearly all respects, to occurrences which actually hap pened during the opening scenes of the Revolution and at other epochs of our history. It pictures th dangers, difficulties, and distresses of a large family living, completely insulated, in the forest. The tal commences with a description of the "region which lie in the angle formed by the junction of the Mohaw with the Hudson, extending as far south as the lin of Pennsylvania, and west to the verge of that vas rolling plain which composes Western New York"— a region of which the novelist has already frequenti written, and the whole of which, with a trivial excep tion, was a wilderness before the Revolution. Withi this district, and on a creek running into the Unadilla a certain Captain Willoughby purchases an estate o "patent," and there retires, with his family and de pendents, to pass the close of his life in agricultura pursuits. He has been an officer in the British army but, after serving many years, has sold his commissio and purchased one for his only son, Robert, who alon does not accompany the party into the forest. Thi party consists of the captain himself; his wife; hi daughter, Beulah; an adopted daughter, Maud Mere dith; an invalid sergeant, Joyce, who had served unde the captain; a Presbyterian preacher, Mr. Woods; Scotch mason, Jamie Allen; an Irish laborer, Micha O'Hearn; a Connecticut man, Joel Strides; four negroe Old Plin and young Plin, Big Smash and little Smash eight axe-men; a house-carpenter; a millwright, &c &c. Besides these, a Tuscarora Indian called Nich

or *Wyandotté,* accompanies the expedition. This Indian, who figures largely in the story, and gives it its title, may be considered as the principal character—the one chiefly elaborated. He is an outcast from his tribe, has been known to Captain Willoughby for thirty years, and is a compound of all the good and bad qualities which made up the character of the half-civilized Indian. He does not remain with the settlers; but appears and re-appears at intervals upon the scene.

Nearly the whole of the first volume is occupied with a detailed account of the estate purchased, (which is termed "The Hutted Knoll," from a natural mound upon which the principal house is built), and of the progressive arrangements and improvements. Toward the close of the volume the Revolution commences; and the party at the "Knoll" are besieged by a band of savages and "rebels," with whom an understanding exists, on the part of Joel Strides, the Yankee. This traitor, instigated by the hope of possessing Captain Willoughby's estate, should it be confiscated, brings about a series of defections from the party of the settlers, and finally, deserting himself, reduces the whole number to six or seven, capable of bearing arms. Captain Willoughby resolves, however, to defend his post. His son, at this juncture, pays him a clandestine visit, and, endeavoring to reconnoitre the position of the Indians, is made captive. The captain, in an attempt at rescue, is murdered by Wyandotté, whose vindictive passions had been aroused by ill-timed allusions, on the part of Willoughby, to floggings previously inflicted, by his orders, upon the Indian. Wyandotté, however, having satisfied his personal vengeance, is

still the ally of the settlers. He guides Maud, who i beloved by Robert, to the hut in which the latter is con fined, and effects his escape. Aroused by this escape the Indians precipitate their attack upon the Knoll which, through the previous treachery of Strides in ill-hanging a gate, is immediately carried. Mrs. Wil loughby, Beulah, and others of the party, are killed Maud is secreted and thus saved by Wyandotté. A the last moment, when all is apparently lost, a reinforce ment appears, under command of Evert Beekman, th husband of Beulah; and the completion of the massacr is prevented. Woods, the preachcer, had left the Knol and made his way through the enemy, to inform Beek man of the dilemma of his friends. Maud and Robe Willoughby are, of course, happily married. The con cluding scene of the novel shows us Wyandotté re penting the murder of Willoughby, and converted t Christianity through the agency of Woods.

It will be at once seen that there is nothing *origina* in this story. On the contrary, it is even excessivel common-place. The lover, for example, rescued fro captivity by the mistress; the Knoll carried throug the treachery of an inmate; and the salvation of th besieged, at the very last moment, by a reinforcemer arriving, in consequence of a message borne to a frien by one of the besieged, without the cognizance of th others; these, we say, are incidents which have bee the common property of every novelist since the in vention of letters. And as for *plot*, there has been n attempt at anything of the kind. The tale is a me succession of events, scarcely any one of which ha any necessary dependence upon any one other. Plo

owever, is at best, an artificial effect, requiring, like
usic, not only a natural bias, but long cultivation of
ste for its full appreciation; some of the finest narra-
ves in the world—"Gil-Blas" and "Robinson Crusoe,"
or example—have been written without its employ-
ent; and "The Hutted Knoll," like all the sea and
orest novels of Cooper, has been made deeply interest-
g, although depending upon this peculiar source of in-
rest not at all. Thus the absence of plot can never
e critically regarded as a *defect;* although its judicious
se, in all cases aiding and in no case injuring other
ffects, must be regarded as of a very high order of
erit.

There are one or two points, however, in the mere
nduct of the story now before us, which may, per-
aps, be considered as defective. For instance, there
too much *obviousness* in all that appertains
the hanging of the large gate. In more than a
ozen instances, Mrs. Willoughby is made to allude
the delay in the hanging; so that the reader is too
ositively and pointedly forced to perceive that this
elay is to result in the capture of the Knoll. As
e are never in doubt of the fact, we feel diminished
terest when it actually happens. A single vague
lusion, well managed, would have been in the true
tistical spirit.

Again: we see too plainly, from the first, that Beek-
an is to marry Beulah, and that Robert Willoughby
to marry Maud. The killing of Beulah, of Mrs.
Villoughby, and Jamie Allen, produces, too, a painful
npression, which does not properly appertain to the
ght fiction. Their deaths affect us as revolting and

supererogatory; since the purposes of the story a not thereby furthered in any regard. To Willoughby murder, however distressing, the reader makes similar objection; merely because in his decease is fu filled a species of poetical justice. We may obser here, nevertheless, that his repeated references to h flogging the Indian seem unnatural, because we ha otherwise no reason to think him a fool, or a madma and these references, under the circumstances, a absolutely insensate. We object, also, to the manner which the general interest is dragged out, or su pended. The besieging party are kept before t Knoll so long, while so little is done, and so ma opportunities of action are lost, that the read takes it for granted that nothing of consequen will occur—that the besieged will be finally delivere He gets so accustomed to the presence of danger th its excitement at length departs. The action is n sufficiently rapid. There is too much procrastinatio There is too much mere talk for talk's sake. The i terminable discussions between Woods and Capta Willoughby are, perhaps, the worst feature of the boo for they have not even the merit of referring to t matters on hand. In general, there is quite too mu colloquy for the purpose of manifesting character, a too little for explanation of motive. The characte of the drama would have been better made out by a tion; while the motives to action, the reasons for t different courses of conduct adopted by the *drama personæ,* might have been made to proceed more sat factorily from their own mouths, in casual convers tions, than from that of the author in person.

onclude our remarks upon the head of ill-conduct in he story, we may mention occasional incidents of the nerest melodramatic absurdity; as, for example, at age 156, of the second volume, where "Willoughby ad an arm around the waist of Maud, and bore her orward with a rapidity to which her own strength as entirely unequal." We may be permitted to doubt whether a young lady, of sound health and limbs, exists, within the limits of Christendom, who could not run aster, on her own proper feet, for any considerable istance, than she could be carried upon *one arm* of ither the Cretan Milo or of the Hercules Farnese.

On the other hand, it would be easy to designate nany particulars which are admirably handled. The ove of Maud Meredith for Robert Willoughby is ainted with exquisite skill and truth. The incident f the tress of hair and box is naturally and effec-ively conceived. A fine collateral interest is thrown ver the whole narrative by the connexion of the theme ith that of the Revolution; and, especially, there is an xcellent dramatic point, at page 124 of the second olume, where Wyandotté, remembering the stripes nflicted upon him by Captain Willoughby, is about o betray him to his foes, when his purpose is arrested y a casual glimpse, through the forest, of the hut hich contains Mrs. Willoughby, who had preserved ne life of the Indian, by inoculation for the small-pox.

In the depicting of character, Mr. Cooper has been nusually successful in "Wyandotté." One or two of is personages, to be sure, must be regarded as little orth. Robert Willoughby, like most novel heroes, s a nobody; that is to say, there is nothing about him

which may be looked upon as distinctive. Perhaps
is rather silly than otherwise; as, for instance, when
confuses all his father's arrangements for his concea
ment, and bursts into the room before Strides—afte
ward insisting upon accompanying that person to t
Indian encampment, without any possible or impossib
object. Woods, the parson, is a sad bore, upon t
Dominie Sampson plan, and is, moreover, caricature
Of Captain Willoughby we have already spoken—
is too often on stilts. Evert Beekman and Peulah a
merely episodical. Joyce is nothing in the world b
Corporal Trim—or, rather, Corporal Trim and wate
Jamie Allen, with his prate about Catholicism, is i
sufferable. But Mrs. Willoughby, the humble, shrin
ing, womanly wife, whose whole existence centres in h
affections, is worthy of Mr. Cooper. Maud Meredi
is still better. In fact, we know no female portra
ture, even in Scott, which surpasses her; and yet t
world has been given to understand, by the enemi
of the novelist, that he is incapable of depicting
woman. Joel Strides will be recognized by all w
are conversant with his general prototypes of Conne
ticut. Michael O'Hearn, the County Leitrim man,
an Irishman all over, and his portraiture abounds
humor; as, for example, at page 31, of the first volun
where he has a difficulty with a skiff, not being able
account for its revolving upon its own axis, inste
of moving forward! or, at page 132, where, duri
divine service, to exclude at least a portion of the her
ical doctrine, he stops *one* of his ears with his thum
or, at page 195, where a passage occurs so much to c
purpose that we will be pardoned for quoting it in fu

aptain Willoughby is drawing his son up through a indow, from his enemies below. The assistants, aced at a distance from this window to avoid observa- on from without, are ignorant of what burthen is at e end of the rope:

The men did as ordered, raising their load from the ground foot or two at a time. In this manner the burthen ap- oached, yard after yard, until it was evidently drawing near e window.

"It's the captain hoisting up the big baste of a hog, for ovisioning the hoose again a saige," whispered Mike to e negroes, who grinned as they tugged; "and, when the aitur squails, see to it, that ye do not squail yourselves."

t that moment the head and shoulders of a man appeared the window. Mike let go the rope, seized a chair, and as about to knock the intruder upon the head; but the cap- in arrested the blow.

"It's one o' the vagabone Injins that has undermined the g and come up in its stead," roared Mike.

"It's my son," said the captain; "see that you are silent d secret."

The negroes are, without exception, admirably drawn. he Indian, Wyandotté, however, is the great feature the book, and is, in every respect, equal to the evious Indian creations of the author of "The oneer." Indeed, we think this "forest gentleman" perior to the other noted heroes of his kind—the roes which have been immortalized by our novelist. is keen sense of the distinction, in his own character, tween the chief, Wyandotté, and the drunken vaga- nd, Sassy Nick; his chivalrous delicacy toward Maud, never disclosing to her that knowledge of her real elings toward Robert Willoughby, which his own

Indian intuition had discovered; his enduring animosity toward Captain Willoughby, softened, and for thirty years delayed, through his gratitude to the wife; and then, the vengeance consummated, his pity for that wife conflicting with his exultation at the deed—these, we say, are all traits of a lofty excellence indeed. Perhaps the most effective passage in the book, and that which most distinctively brings out the character of the Tuscarora, is to be found at pages 50, 51, 52, and 53 of the second volume, where, for some trivial misdemeanor, the captain threatens to make use of the whip. The manner in which the Indian *harps* upon the threat returning to it again and again, in every variety of phrase, forms one of the finest pieces of mere character painting with which we have any acquaintance.

The most obvious and most unaccountable faults of "The Hutted Knoll," are those which appertain to the *style,* to the mere grammatical construction; for, in other and more important particulars of style, Mr. Cooper, of late days, has made a very manifest improvement. His sentences, however, are arranged with an awkwardness so remarkable as to be matter of absolute astonishment, when we consider the education of the author, and his long and continual practice with the pen. In minute descriptions of localities, any verbal inaccuracy or confusion becomes a source of vexation and misunderstanding, detracting very much from the pleasure of perusal; and in these inaccuracies "Wyandotté" abounds. Although, for instance, we carefully read and re-read that portion of the narrative which details the situation of the Knoll, and the construction of the buildings and walls about it, we were

rced to proceed with the story without any exact or finite impressions upon the subject. Similar difulties, from similar causes, occur *passim* throughout e book. For example: at page 41, vol. I.:

"The Indian gazed at the house, with that fierce inıtness which sometimes glared, in a manner that had t to be, in its ordinary aspects, dull and besotted." his it is utterly impossible to comprehend. We preme, however, the intention is to say that although the dian's ordinary manner (of gazing) had "got to be" ll and besotted, he occasionally gazed with an intentss that glared, and that he did so in the instance in estion. The "got to be" is atrocious—the whole ıtence no less so.

Here at page 9, vol. I., is something excessively gue: "Of the latter character is the face of most of t region which lies in the angle formed by the junction of the Mohawk with the Hudson," &c., &c. The ohawk, joining the Hudson, forms *two* angles, of ırse,—an acute and an obtuse one; and, without ther explanation, it is difficult to say which is inded.

At page 55, vol. I., we read:—"The captain, owing his English education, had avoided straight lines, l formal paths; giving to the little spot the improvent on nature which is a consequence of embellishing works without destroying them. On each side of s lawn was an orchard, thrifty and young, and which re already beginning to show signs of putting forth ir blossoms." Here we are tautologically informed t improvement is a consequence of embellishment, l supererogatorily told that the rule holds good only

where the embellishment is not accompanied by d
struction. Upon the "each orchard *were*" it is nee
less to comment.

At page 30, vol. I., is something similar, whe
Strides is represented as "never doing anything th
required a particle more than the exertion and streng
that were absolutely necessary to effect his object
Did Mr. Cooper ever hear of any labor that *requir*
more exertion than was *necessary?* He means to s
that Strides exerted himself no farther than was nec
sary—that's all.

At page 59, vol. I., we find this sentence—"He w
advancing by the only road that was ever travelled
the stranger as he approached the Hut; or, he ca
up the valley." This is merely a vagueness of spee
"Or" is intended to imply "that is to say." The wh
would be clearer thus—"He was advancing by t
valley—the only road travelled by a stranger approac
ing the Hut." We have here sixteen words, instead
Mr. Cooper's twenty-five.

At page 8, vol. II., is an unpardonable awkwardne
although an awkwardness strictly grammatical. "I w
a favorite, I believe, with, certainly was much pett
by, both." Upon this we need make no farther obs
vation. It speaks for itself.

We are aware, however, that there is a certain
of unfairness, in thus quoting detached passages, f
animadversion of this kind; for, however strictly
random our quotations may really be, we have,
course, no means of proving the fact to our reade
and there are *no* authors, from whose works individ
inaccurate sentences may not be culled. But we me

say that Mr. Cooper, no doubt through haste or eglect, is *remarkably* and *especially* inaccurate, as a eneral rule; and, by way of demonstrating this asser- on, we will dismiss our extracts at random, and discuss me entire page of his composition. More than this: e will endeavor to select that particular page upon hich it might naturally be supposed he would bestow e most careful attention. The reader will say at once -"Let this be his *first* page—the first page of his Pref- e." This page, then, shall be taken of course.

The history of the borders is filled with legends of the fferings of isolated families, during the troubled scenes colonial warfare. Those which we now offer to the reader, e distinctive in many of their leading facts, if not rigidly ıe in the details. The first alone is necessary to the legiti- ıte objects of fiction.

"Abounds with legends," would be better than "is led with legends"; for it is clear that if the history ere *filled* with legends, it would be all legend and no story. The word "of," too, occurs, in the first sen- nce, with an unpleasant frequency. The *"those"* mmencing the second sentence, grammatically refers the noun "scenes," immediately preceding, but is in- nded for "legends." The adjective *"distinctive"* is guely and altogether improperly employed. Mr. ooper, we believe, means to say, merely, that although e details of his legends may not be strictly true, facts nilar to his leading ones have actually occurred. By e of the word *"distinctive,"* however, he has contrived convey a meaning nearly converse. In saying that s legend is *"distinctive"* in many of the leading facts, has said what he, clearly, did not wish to say, viz:

that his legend contained facts which distinguished from all other legends—in other words, facts never be fore discussed in other legends, and belonging peculiarl to his own. That Mr. Cooper *did* mean what we sup pose, is rendered evident by the third sentence—"Th first alone is necessary to the legitimate objects of fi tion." This third sentence itself, however, is very badl constructed. "The first" can refer, grammatically, onl to "facts"; but no such reference is intended. If w ask the question—what is meant by "the first"?—*wh* "alone is necessary to the legitimate objects of fiction" —the natural reply is "that facts similar to the leadin ones have actually happened." The circumstance alone to be cared for—this consideration "alone necessary to the legitimate objects of fiction."

"One of the misfortunes of a nation is to hear noth ing besides its own praises." This is the fourth sen tence, and is by no means lucid. The design is t say that individuals composing a nation, and livin altogether within the national bounds, hear from eac other only praises of the nation, and that this is a mi fortune to the individuals, since it misleads them in r gard to the actual condition of the nation. Here will be seen that, to convey the intended idea, we hav been forced to make distinction between the nation an its individual members; for it is evident that a natio is considered as such only in reference to other nations and thus *as a nation,* it hears *very* much "besides i own praise"; that is to say, it hears the detractions o other rival nations. In endeavoring to compel h meaning within the compass of a brief sentence, M Cooper has completely sacrificed its intelligibility.

The fifth sentence runs thus:—"Although the Amer-
an Revolution was probably as just an effort as was
er made by a people to resist the first inroads of op-
ession, the cause had its evil aspects, as well as all
ner human struggles."

The American Revolution is here improperly called
"effort." The effort was the cause, of which the
evolution was the result. A rebellion is an "effort"
effect a revolution. An "inroad of oppression" in-
lves an untrue metaphor; for "inroad" appertains
aggression, to attack, to active assault. "The cause
d its evil aspects as well as all other human
uggles," implies that the cause had not only its evil
pects, but had, also, all other human struggles. If
e words must be retained at all, they should be thus
ranged—"The cause like [for as well as] all other
man struggles, had its evil aspects"; or better thus—
he cause had its evil aspects, as have all human
uggles." "Other" is superfluous.

The sixth sentence is thus written;—"We have been
much accustomed to hear everything extolled, of
e years, that could be dragged into the remotest con-
xion with that great event, and the principles which
to it, that there is danger of overlooking truth in
pseudo patriotism." The "of late years," here,
ould follow the "accustomed," or precede the "We
ve been"; and the Greek "pseudo" is objectionable,
ce its exact equivalent is to be found in the English
lse." "Spurious" would be better, perhaps, than
ner.

Inadvertences such as these sadly disfigure the style
"The Hutted Knoll"; and every true friend of its

author must regret his inattention to the minor mora
of the Muse. But these "minor morals," it may b
said, are trifles at best. Perhaps so. At all event
we should never have thought of dwelling so pertina
ciously upon the unessential demerits of "Wyandotté
could we have discovered any more momentous upo
which to comment.

1843

THE LITERATI

OF CRITICISM—PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

In a criticism on Byrant, published in the last num-
r of this magazine, I was at some pains in pointing
t the distinction between the popular "opinion" of the
erits of contemporary authors, and that held and ex-
essed of them in private literary society. The former
ecies of "opinion" can be called "opinion" only by
urtesy. It is the public's own, just as we consider a
ok our own when we have bought it. In general,
s opinion is adopted from the journals of the day, and
have endeavored to show that the cases are rare in-
ed in which these journals express any other senti-
ents about books than such as may be attributed di-
ctly or indirectly to the authors of the books. The
ost "popular," the most "successful" writers among
, (for a brief period, at least,) are, ninety-nine times
t of a hundred, persons of a mere address, persever-
ce, effrontery—in a word, busy-bodies, toadies,
acks. These people easily succeed in *boring* editors
hose attention is too often entirely engrossed by
litics or other "business" matter) into the admission
favorable notices written or caused to be written by
erested parties—or, at least, into the admission of
me notice where, under ordinary circumstances, *no*
tice would be given at all. In this way ephemeral

"reputations" are manufactured, which, for the mos
part, serve all the purposes designed—that is to say, th
putting money into the purse of the quack and th
quack's publisher; for there never was a quack wh
could be brought to comprehend the value of mer
fame. Now, men of genius will not resort to thes
manœuvres, because genius involves in its very essenc
a scorn of chicanery; and thus for a time the quack
always get the advantage of them, both in respect t
pecuniary profit and what *appears* to be public esteem

There is another point of view, too. Your literar
quacks court, in especial, the personal acquaintance o
those "connected with the press." Now these latte
even when penning a voluntary, that is to say, an unin
stigated notice of the book of an acquaintance, feel a
if writing not so much for the eye of the public as fo
the eye of the acquaintance, and the notice is fashione
accordingly. The bad points of the work are slurre
over, and the good ones brought out into the best ligh
all this through a feeling akin to that which makes i
unpleasant to speak ill of one to one's face. In the cas
of men of genius, editors, as a general rule, have n
such delicacy—for the simple reason that, as a genera
rule, they have no acquaintance with these men o
genius, a class proverbial for shunning society.

But the very editors who hesitate at saying in prin
an ill word of an author personally known, are usuall
the most frank in speaking about him privately. I
literary society, they seem bent upon avenging th
wrongs self-inflicted upon their own consciences. Here
accordingly, the quack is treated as he deserves—eve
a little more harshly than he deserves—by way of strik

ng a balance. True merit, on the same principle, is pt to be slightly overrated; but, upon the whole, there a close approximation to absolute honesty of opinon; and this honesty is farther secured by the mere rouble to which it puts one in conversation to model ne's countenance to a falsehood. We place on paper ithout hesitation a tissue of flatteries, to which in ociety we could not give utterance, for our lives, without either blushing or laughing outright.

For these reasons there exists a very remarkable iscrepancy between the apparent public opinion of any iven author's merits, and the opinion which is expressed of him orally by those who are best qualified o judge. For example, Mr. Hawthorne, the author f "Twice-Told Tales," is scarcely recognised by the ress or by the public, and when noticed at all, is noced merely to be damned by faint praise. Now, my wn opinion of him is, that, although his walk is limited, nd he is fairly to be charged with mannerism, treating l subjects in a similar tone of dreamy *innuendo,* yet in is walk he evinces extraordinary genius, having no val either in America or elsewhere—and this opinion have never heard gainsaid by any one literary person the country. That this opinion, however, is a spoken nd not a written one, is referable to the facts, first, that Ir. Hawthorne *is* a poor man, and, second, that he *is ot* an ubiquitous quack.

Again, of Mr. Longfellow, who, although a little uacky *per se,* has, through his social and literary posion as a man of property and a professor at Hard, a whole legion of active quacks at his control—*him* what is the apparent popular opinion? Of

course, that he is a poetical phenomenon, as entirel without fault, as is the luxurious paper upon which h poems are invariably borne to the public eye. In pr vate society he is regarded with one voice as a poet c far more than usual ability, a skilful artist and a wel read man, but as less remarkable in either capacity tha as a determined imitator and a dexterous adapter c the ideas of other people. For years I have converse with no literary person who did not entertain precisel these ideas of Professor L.; and, in fact, on all literar topics, there is in society a seemingly wonderful coi cidence of opinion. The author accustomed to secl sion, and mingling for the first time with those who hav been associated with him only through their works, astonished and delighted at finding common to all who he meets conclusions which he had blindly fancied we attained by himself alone, and in opposition to the judg ment of mankind.

In the series of papers which I now propose, m design is, in giving my own unbiased opinion of th *literati* (male and female) of New York, to give at th same time very closely, if not with absolute accurac that of conversational society in literary circles. must be expected, of course, that, in innumerable pa ticulars, I shall differ from the voice, that is to sa from what appears to be the voice of the public—b this is a matter of no consequence whatever.

New York literature may be taken as a fair repr sentation of that of the country at large. The city i self is the focus of American letters. Its authors i clude, perhaps, one-fourth of all in America, and th influence they exert on their brethren, if seeming

ilent, is not the less extensive and decisive. As I shall ave to speak of many individuals, my limits will not ermit me to speak of them otherwise than in brief; ut this brevity will be merely consistent with the de-ign, which is that of simple *opinion,* with little of ither argument or detail. With one or two excep-ions, I am well acquainted with every author to be ntroduced, and I shall avail myself of the acquaintance o convey, generally, some idea of the personal appear-nce of all who, in this regard, would be likely to in-erest the readers of the magazine. As any precise rder or arrangement seems unnecessary and may be nconvenient, I shall maintain none. It will be under-tood that, without reference to supposed merit or de-nerit, each individual is introduced absolutely at ran-om.

1846

N. P. WILLIS

Whatever may be thought of Mr. Willis's talent there can be no doubt about the fact that, both as a author and as a man, he has made a good deal of noi in the world—at least for an American. His literar life, in especial, has been one continual *émeute* [t mult]; but then his literary character is modified impelled in a very remarkable degree by his person one. His success (for in point of fame, if of nothin else, he has certainly been successful) is to be a tributed, one-third to his mental ability and two-thir to his physical temperament—the latter goading hi into the accomplishment of what the former mere gave him the means of accomplishing.

At a very early age Mr. Willis seems to have a rived at an understanding that, in a republic such ours, the *mere* man of letters must ever be a ciphe and endeavored, accordingly, to unite the *éclat* of t littérateur with that of the man of fashion or of societ He "pushed himself," went much into the world, ma friends with the gentler sex, "delivered" poetical a dresses, wrote "scriptural" poems, travelled, sought t intimacy of noted women, and got into quarrels wi notorious men. All these things served his purpose—i indeed, I am right in supposing that he had any purpo at all. It is quite probable that, as before hinted, acted only in accordance with his physical temperamen

ut, be this as it may, his *personnel* greatly advanced, it did not altogether establish his literary fame. I ave often carefully considered whether, without the *hysique* of which I speak, there is that in the absolute *orale* of Mr. Willis which would have earned him eputation as a man of letters, and my conclusion is, iat he could not have failed to become noted in *some* egree under almost any circumstances, but that about vo-thirds (as above stated) of his appreciation by the ublic should be attributed to those *adventures* which rew immediately out of his animal constitution.

He received what is usually regarded as a "good ducation"—that is to say, he graduated at college; but is education, in the path he pursued, was worth to m, on account of his extraordinary *savoir faire,* fully vice as much as would have been its value in any ommon case. No man's knowledge is more available, o man has exhibited greater *tact* in the seemingly isual display of his wares. With *him,* at least, a little arning is *no* dangerous thing. He possessed at one me, I believe, the average quantum of American colgiate lore—"a little Latin and less Greek," a smatring of physical and metaphysical science, and (I ould judge) a *very* little of the mathematics—but all is must be considered as mere *guess* on my part. Ir. Willis speaks French with some fluency, and Italn not quite so well.

Within the ordinary range of *belles lettres* authorip, he has evinced much versatility. If called on designate him by any general literary title, I might rm him a magazinist—for his compositions have inriably the species of *effect,* with the brevity which the

magazine demands. We may view him as a paragraph
ist, an essayist, or rather "sketcher," a tale writer, an
a poet.

In the first capacity he fails. His points, howeve
good when deliberately wrought, are too *recherchés* t
be put hurriedly before the public eye. Mr. W. ha
by no means the *readiness* which the editing a news
paper demands. He composes (as did Addison, an
as do many of the most brilliant and seemingly *dash
ing* writers of the present day,) with great labor an
frequent erasure and interlineation. His MSS., in th
regard, present a very singular appearance, and indica
the *vacillation* which is, perhaps, the leading trait
his character. A newspaper, too, in its longer articl
—its "leaders"—very frequently demands argument
tion, and here Mr. W. is remarkably out of his elemen
His exuberant *fancy* leads him over hedge and ditch
anywhere from the main road; and, besides, he is far t
readily self-dispossessed. With time at command, hov
ever, his great *tact* stands him instead of all argument
tive power, and enables him to overthrow an antag
nist without permitting the latter to see how he is ove
thrown. A fine example of this "management" is
be found in Mr. W.'s reply to a very inconsiderate a
tack upon his social standing, made by one of the edito
of the New York "Courier and Inquirer." I have a
ways regarded this reply as the highest evidence of i
author's ability, as a masterpiece of ingenuity, if not
absolute genius. The skill of the whole lay in this-
that, without troubling himself to refute the charg
themselves brought against him by Mr. Raymond,
put forth his strength in rendering them null, to all i

ents and purposes, by obliterating, incidentally and ithout letting his design be perceived, all *the impres-ion* these charges were calculated to convey. But this eply can be called a newspaper article only on the round of its having appeared in a newspaper.

As a writer of "sketches," properly so called, Mr. Villis is unequalled. Sketches—especially of society —are his *forte,* and they are so for no other reason han that they afford him the best opportunity of in-roducing the personal Willis—or, more distinctly, be-ause this species of composition is most susceptible of npression from this personal character. The *dégagé* one of this kind of writing, too, best admits and en-ourages that *fancy* which Mr. W. possesses in the most xtraordinary degree; it is in fancy that he reigns su-reme; this, more than any one other quality, and, in-eed, more than all his other *literary* qualities combined, as made him what he is.[1] It is this which gives him

[1] As, by metaphysicians and in ordinary discourse, the word *ncy* is used with very little determinateness of meaning, I ay be pardoned for repeating here what I have elsewhere said this topic. I shall thus be saved much misapprehension in gard to the term—one which will necessarily be often em-oyed in the course of this series.

"Fancy," says the author of "Aids to Reflection," (who ded reflection to much better purpose in his "Genevieve,") "fancy combines—imagination creates." This was intended d has been received as a distinction, but it is a distinction ithout a difference—without a difference even of degree. he fancy as nearly creates as the imagination, and neither at . Novel conceptions are merely unusual combinations. ne mind of man can imagine nothing which does not really ist; if it could, it would create not only ideally but sub-antially, as do the thoughts of God. It may be said, "We agine a griffin, yet a griffin does not exist." Not the griffin, rtainly, but its component parts. It is no more than a col-

the originality, the freshness, the point, the piquancy which appear to be the immediate, but which ar in fact, the mediate sources of his popularity.

lation of known limbs, features, qualities. Thus with all whic claims to be new, which appears to be a creation of the inte lect—all is re-soluble into the old. The wildest effort of th mind cannot stand the test of this analysis.

Imagination, fancy, fantasy, and humor, have in comm the elements combination and novelty. The imagination is th artist of the four. From novel arrangements of old form which present themselves to it, it selects such only as a harmonious; the result, of course, is *beauty* itself—using th word in its most extended sense and as inclusive of the su lime. The pure imagination chooses, *from either beauty deformity*, only the most combinable things hitherto uncon bined; the compound, as a general rule, partaking in cha acter of sublimity or beauty in the ratio of the respecti sublimity or beauty of the things combined, which are ther selves still to be considered as atomic—that is to say, as pr vious combinations. But, as often analogously happens physical chemistry, so not unfrequently does it occur in th chemistry of the intellect, that the admixture of two elemen will result in a something that shall have nothing of the qua ity of one of them—or even nothing of the qualities of eithe The range of imagination is thus unlimited. Its materia extend throughout the universe. Even out of deformities fabricates that *beauty* which is at once its sole object and inevitable test. But, in general, the richness of the matte combined, the facility of discovering combinable novelties wor combining, and *the absolute "chemical combination"* of t completed mass, are the particulars to be regarded in our es mate of imagination. It is this thorough harmony of an ima inative work which so often causes it to be undervalued by t undiscriminating, through the character of *obviousness* whi is superinduced. We are apt to find ourselves asking *why is that these combinations have never been imagined before?*

Now, when this question *does not occur*, when the harmo of the combination is comparatively neglected, and when, addition to the element of novelty, there is introduced t sub-element of *unexpectedness*—when, for example, matte are brought into combination which not only have never be combined, but whose combination strikes us as a *difficulty ha*

In *tales* (written with deliberation for the magazines) has shown greater *constructiveness* than I should ve given him credit for had I not read his composi- ons of this order—for in this faculty all his other orks indicate a singular deficiency. The chief charm en of these tales, however, is still referable to *fancy*. As a poet, Mr. Willis is not entitled, I think, to so gh a rank as he may justly claim through his prose; d this for the reason that, although fancy is not in- nsistent with any of the demands of those classes of ose composition which he has attempted, and, indeed, a vital element of most of them, still it is at war (as ll be understood from what I have said in the foot te) with that purity and perfection of *beauty* which e the soul of the poem proper. I wish to be under-

y *overcome*, the result then appertains to the fancy, and is, the majority of mankind, more grateful than the purely rmonious one—although, absolutely, it is less beautiful (or and) for the reason that *it is* less harmonious.

Carrying its errors into excess—for, however enticing, they errors still, or nature lies—fancy is at length found in- nging upon the province of fantasy. The votaries of this ter delight not only in novelty and unexpectedness of com- nation, but in the *avoidance* of proportion. The result is, refore, abnormal, and, to a healthy mind, affords less of asure through its novelty than of pain through its inco- rence. When, proceeding a step farther, however, fancy ks not merely disproportionate but incongruous or antag- stic elements, the effect is rendered more pleasurable by its eater positiveness, there is a merry effort of truth to shake m her that which is no property of hers, and we laugh out- ht in recognising humor.

The four faculties in question seem to me all of their class; when either fancy or humor is expressed to gain an end, pointed at a purpose—whenever either becomes objective place of subjective, then it becomes, also, pure wit or sar- m, just as the purpose is benevolent or malevolent.

stood as saying this *generally* of our author's poem
In some instances, seeming to *feel* the truth of my pro
osition, (that fancy should have no place in the lofti
poesy,) he has denied it a place, as in "Melanie," a
his Scriptural pieces; but, unfortunately, he has be
unable to supply the void with the true imagination, a
these poems consequently are deficient in vigor, in *st*
men. The Scriptural pieces are quite "correct," as t
French have it, and are much admired by a certain s
of readers, who judge of a poem, not by its effect
themselves, but by the effect which they imagine
might have upon themselves were they not unhappi
soulless, and by the effect which they take it for grant
it *does* have upon others. It cannot be denied, howeve
that these pieces are, in general tame, or indebted f
what force they possess to the Scriptural passages
which they are merely paraphrastic. I quote what,
my own opinion, and in that of nearly all my frien
is really the truest poem ever written by Mr. Willis.

UNSEEN SPIRITS

The shadows lay along Broadway,
'Twas near the twilight tide,
And slowly there a lady fair
Was walking in her pride—
Alone walked she, yet viewlessly
Walked spirits at her side.

Peace charmed the street beneath her feet,
And honor charmed the air,
And all astir looked kind on her
And called her good as fair—
For all God ever gave to her
She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare
From lovers warm and true,
For her heart was cold to all but gold,
And the rich came not to woo.
Ah, honored well are charms to sell
When priests the selling do!

Now, walking there was one more fair—
A slight girl, lily-pale,
And she had unseen company
To make the spirit quail—
'Twixt want and scorn she walked forlorn,
And nothing could avail.

No mercy now can clear her brow
For this world's peace to pray—
For, as love's wild prayer dissolved in air,
Her woman's heart gave way;
And the sin forgiven by Christ in heaven
By man is cursed alway.

There is about this little poem (evidently written n haste and through impulse) a true *imagination*. Its race, dignity and pathos are impressive, and there is nore in it of earnestness, of soul, than in anything I ve seen from the pen of its author. His compositions, general, have a taint of worldliness, of insincerity. he identical rhyme in the last stanza is very notice- ble, and the whole *finale* is feeble. It would be im- roved by making the last two lines precede the first two the stanza.

In classifying Mr. W.'s writings I did not think it orth while to speak of him as a dramatist, because, al- ough he has written plays, what they have of merit is together in their character of poem. Of his "Bianca isconti" I have little to say;—it deserved to fail, and

did, although it abounded in *eloquent* passages. "Tortesa" abounded in the same, but had a great many dramatic *points* well calculated to tell with a conventional audience. Its characters, with the exception of Tomaso, a drunken buffoon, had no character at all, and the *plot* was a tissue of absurdities, inconsequences and inconsistencies; yet I cannot help thinking it, upon the whole, the best play ever written by an American.

Mr. Willis has made very few attempts at criticism, and those few (chiefly newspaper articles) have not impressed me with a high idea of his analytic abilities, although with a *very* high idea of his taste and discrimination.

His *style* proper may be called extravagant, *bizarre*, pointed, epigrammatic without being antithetical (this is very rarely the case,) but, through all its whimsicalities, graceful, classic and *accurate*. He is very seldom to be caught tripping in the minor morals. His English is *correct;* his most outrageous imagery is, at all events, unmixed.

Mr. Willis's career has naturally made him enemies among the envious host of dunces whom he has outstripped in the race for fame; and these his personal manner (a little tinctured with reserve, *brusquerie*, or even haughtiness) is by no means adapted to conciliate. He has innumerable warm friends, however, and is himself a warm friend. He is impulsive, generous, bold, impetuous, vacillating, irregularly energetic—apt to be hurried into error, but incapable of deliberate wrong.

He is yet young, and, without being handsome, in the ordinary sense, is a remarkably well looking man. In

height he is, perhaps, five feet eleven, and justly proportioned. His figure is put in the best light by the ease and assured grace of his carriage. His whole person and personal demeanor bear about them the traces of "good society." His face is somewhat too full, or rather heavy, in its lower portions. Neither his nose nor his forehead can be defended; the latter would puzzle phrenology. His eyes are a dull bluish gray, and small. His hair is of a rich brown, curling naturally and luxuriantly. His mouth is well cut; the teeth fine; the expression of the smile intellectual and winning. He converses little, *well* rather than fluently, and in a subdued tone. The portrait of him published about three years ago in "Graham's Magazine," conveys by no means so true an idea of the man as does the sketch (by Lawrence) inserted as frontispiece to a late collection of his poems.

1846

FITZ-GREENE HALLECK

The name of Halleck is at least as well established in the poetical world as that of any American. Our principal poets are, perhaps, most frequently named in this order—Bryant, Halleck, Dana, Sprague, Longfellow, Willis, and so on—Halleck coming second in the series but holding, in fact, a rank in the public opinion quite equal to that of Bryant. The accuracy of the arrangement as above made may, indeed, be questioned. For my own part, I should have it thus—Longfellow, Bryant, Halleck, Willis, Sprague, Dana; and, estimating rather the poetic capacity than the poems actually accomplished, there are three or four comparatively unknown writers whom I would place in the series between Bryant and Halleck, while there are about a dozen whom I should assign a position between Willis and Sprague. Two dozen at least might find room between Sprague and Dana—this latter, I fear, owing a very large portion of his reputation to his *quondam* editorial connexion with "The North American Review." One or two poets, now in my mind's eye, I should have no hesitation in posting above even Mr. Longfellow—still not intending this as very extravagant praise.

It is noticeable, however, that, in the arrangement which I attribute to the popular understanding, the order observed is nearly, if not exactly, that of the ages—the poetic ages—of the individual poets. Those rank

first who were first known. The priority has established the strength of impression. Nor is this result to be accounted for by mere reference to the old saw—that first impressions are the strongest. Gratitude, surprise, and a species of hyper-patriotic triumph have been blended, and finally confounded with admiration or appreciation in regard to the *pioneers* of American literature, among whom there is not one whose productions have not been grossly overrated by his countrymen. Hitherto we have been in no mood to view with calmness and discuss with discrimination the real claims of the few who were *first* in convincing the mother country that her sons were not all brainless, as at one period she half affected and wholly wished to believe. Is there any one so blind as not to see that Mr. Cooper, for example, owes much, and Mr. Paulding nearly all, of his reputation as a novelist to his early occupation of the field? Is there any one so dull as not to know that fictions which neither of these gentlemen *could* have written are written daily by native authors, without attracting much more of commendation than can be included in a newspaper paragraph? And, again, is there any one so prejudiced as not to acknowledge that all this happens because there is no longer either reason or wit in the query, "Who reads an American book?"

I mean to say, of course, that Mr. Halleck, in the *apparent* public estimate, maintains a somewhat better position than that to which, on absolute grounds, he is entitled. There is something, too, in the *bonhomie* of certain of his compositions—something altogether distinct from poetic merit—which has aided to estab-

lish him; and much, also, must be admitted on the score of his personal popularity, which is deservedly great. With all these allowances, however, there will still be found a large amount of poetical fame to which he is *fairly* entitled.

He has written very little, although he began at an early age—when quite a boy, indeed. His "juvenile" works, however, have been kept very judiciously from the public eye. Attention was first called to him by his satires, signed "Croaker" and "Croaker & Co.," published in "The New York Evening Post," in 1819. Of these the pieces with the signature *"Croaker & Co."* were the joint work of Halleck and his friend Drake. The political and personal features of these *jeux d'esprit* gave them a consequence and a notoriety to which they are entitled on no other account. They are not without a species of drollery, but are loosely and no doubt carelessly written.

Neither was "Fanny," which closely followed the "Croakers," constructed with any great deliberation. "It was printed," say the ordinary memoirs, "within three weeks from its commencement"; but the truth is that a couple of days would have been an ample allowance of time for any such composition. If we except a certain gentlemanly ease and *insouciance,* with some fancy of illustration, there is really very little about this poem to be admired. There has been no positive avowal of its authorship, although there can be no doubt of its having been written by Halleck. He, I presume, does not esteem it very highly. It is a mere extravaganza, in close imitation of "Don Juan"—a vehicle for squibs at contemporary persons and things.

Our poet, indeed, seems to have been much impressed by "Don Juan," and attempts to engraft its farcicalities even upon the grace and delicacy of "Alnwick Castle," as, for example, in—

> Men in the coal and cattle line,
> From Teviot's bard and hero land,
> From royal Berwick's beach of sand,
> From Wooler, Morpeth, Hexham, *and*
> Newcastle upon Tyne.

These things may lay claim to oddity, but no more. They are totally out of keeping with the tone of the sweet poem into which they are thus clumsily introduced, and serve no other purpose than to deprive it of all unity of effect. If a poet *must* be farcical, let him be just that; he can be nothing better at the same moment. To be drolly sentimental, or even sentimentally droll, is intolerable to men and gods and columns.

"Alnwick Castle" is distinguished, in general, by that air of quiet grace, both in thought and expression, which is the prevailing feature of the muse of Halleck. Its second stanza is a good specimen of this manner. The commencement of the fourth belongs to a very high order of poetry.

> Wild roses by the Abbey towers
> Are gay in their young bud and bloom—
> *They were born of a race of funeral flowers*
> That garlanded, in long-gone hours,
> A Templar's knightly tomb.

This is gloriously imaginative, and the effect is singularly increased by the sudden transition from iambuses to anapæsts. The passage is, I think, the noblest to

be found in Halleck, and I would be at a loss to dis-
cover its parallel in all American poetry.

"Marco Bozzaris" has much lyrical, without any
great amount of *ideal* beauty. Force is its prevailing
feature—force resulting rather from well-ordered metre
vigorous rhythm, and a judicious disposal of the cir-
cumstances of the poem, than from any of the true
lyric material. I should do my conscience great wrong
were I to speak of "Marco Bozzaris" as it is the fashion
to speak of it, at least in print. Even as a lyric or
ode it is surpassed by many American and a multitude
of foreign compositions of a similar character.

"Burns" has numerous passages exemplifying its
author's felicity of *expression;* as, for instance—

> Such graves as his are pilgrim shrines—
> Shrines to no code or creed confined—
> *The Delphian vales, the Palestines,*
> *The Meccas of the mind.*

And, again—

> There have been loftier themes than his,
> *And longer scrolls and louder lyres,*
> *And lays lit up with Poesy's*
> *Purer and holier fires.*

But to the *sentiment* involved in this last quatrain
feel disposed to yield an assent more thorough tha
might be expected. Burns, indeed, was the puppet o
circumstance. As a poet, no person on the face of th
earth has been more extravagantly, more absurdly over
rated.

"The Poet's Daughter" is one of the most charac
teristic works of Halleck, abounding in his most distinc

tive traits, grace, expression, repose, *insouciance*. The vulgarity of

> I'm busy in the cotton trade
> And sugar line,

has, I rejoice to see been omitted in the late editions. The eleventh stanza is certainly not English as it stands, and, besides, is quite unintelligible. What is the meaning of this—

> But her who asks, though first among
> The good, the beautiful, the young,
> The birthright of a spell more strong
> Than these have brought her.

The "Lines on the Death of Joseph Rodman Drake" is, as a whole, one of the best poems of its author. Its simplicity and delicacy of sentiment will recommend it to all readers. It is, however, carelessly written, and the first quatrain,

> Green be the turf above thee,
> Friend of my better days—
> None knew thee but to love thee,
> Nor named thee but to praise.

although beautiful, bears too close a resemblance to the still more beautiful lines of Wordsworth—

> She dwelt among the untrodden ways
> Beside the springs of Dove,
> A maid whom there were none to praise,
> And very few to love.

In versification Mr. Halleck is much as usual, although in this regard Mr. Bryant has paid him numer-

ous compliments. "Marco Bozzaris" has certainly som vigor of rhythm, but its author, in short, writes care lessly, loosely, and, as a matter of course, seldom ef fectively, so far as the outworks of literature are con cerned.

Of late days he has nearly given up the muses, and w recognise his existence as a poet chiefly by occasiona translations from the Spanish or German.

Personally, he is a man to be admired, respected, bu more especially beloved. His address has all the cap tivating *bonhomie* which is the leading feature of hi poetry, and, indeed, of his whole moral nature. Wit his friends he is all ardor, enthusiasm and cordiality but to the world at large he is reserved, shunning society into which he is seduced only with difficulty, and upo rare occasions. The love of solitude seems to hav become with him a passion.

He is a good modern linguist, and an excellent *belle lettres* scholar; in general, has read a great deal, a though very discursively. He is what the world cal *ultra* in most of his opinions, more particularly abou literature and politics, and is fond of broaching an supporting paradoxes. He converses fluently, wit animation and zeal; is choice and accurate in h language, exceedingly quick at repartee, and apt a anecdote. His manners are courteous, with dignity an a little tincture of Gallicism. His age is about fift In height he is probably five feet seven. He *has bee* stout, but may now be called well-proportioned. H forehead is a noble one, broad, massive and intellectua a little bald about the temples; eyes dark and brillian but not large; nose Grecian; chin prominent; mout

finely chiselled and full of expression, although the lips are thin;—his smile is peculiarly sweet.

In "Graham's Magazine" for September, 1843, there appeared an engraving of Mr. Halleck from a painting by Inman. The likeness conveys a good general idea of the man, but is far too stout and youthful-looking for his appearance at present.

His usual pursuits have been commercial, but he is now the principal superintendent of the business of Mr. John Jacob Astor. He is unmarried.

1846

SARAH MARGARET FULLER

Miss Fuller was at one time editor, or one of th editors of "The Dial," to which she contributed man of the most forcible and certainly some of the mos peculiar papers. She is known, too, by "Summer o the Lakes," a remarkable assemblage of sketches, issue in 1844, by Little & Brown, of Boston. More latel she has published "Woman in the Nineteenth Cen tury," a work which has occasioned much discussion having had the good fortune to be warmly abused an chivalrously defended. At present, she is assistant ed tor of "The New York Tribune," or rather a salarie contributor to that journal, for which she has furnishe a great variety of matter, chiefly notices of new book etc., etc., her articles being designated by an asterisk Two of the best of them were a review of Professo Longfellow's late magnificent edition of his own work (with a portrait,) and an appeal to the public in be half of her friend Harro Harring. The review did he infinite credit; it was frank, candid, independent—i even ludicrous contrast to the usual mere glorificatio of the day, giving honor *only* where honor was due, y evincing the most thorough capacity to appreciate an the most sincere intention to place in the fairest ligh the real and idiosyncratic merits of the poet.

In my opinion it is one of the very few reviews o Longfellow's poems, ever published in America, o

which the critics have not had abundant reason to be ashamed. Mr. Longfellow is entitled to a certain and very distinguished rank among the poets of his country, but that country is disgraced by the evident toadyism which would award to his social position and influence, to his fine paper and large type, to his morocco binding and gilt edges, to his flattering portrait of himself, and to the illustrations of his poems by Huntingdon, that amount of indiscriminate approbation which neither could nor would have been given to the poems themselves.

The defence of Harro Harring, or rather the Philippic against those who were doing him wrong, was one of the most eloquent and well-*put* articles I have ever yet seen in a newspaper.

"Woman in the Nineteenth Century" is a book which few women in the country could have written, and no woman in the country would have published, with the exception of Miss Fuller. In the way of independence, of unmitigated radicalism, it is one of the "Curiosities of American Literature," and Doctor Griswold should include it in his book. I need scarcely say that the essay is nervous, forcible, thoughtful, suggestive, brilliant, and to a certain extent scholar-like—for all that Miss Fuller produces is entitled to these epithets—but I must say that the conclusions reached are only in part my own. Not that they are too bold, by any means—too novel, too startling, or too dangerous in their consequences, but that in their attainment too many premises have been distorted, and too many analogical inferences left altogether out of sight. I mean to say that the intention of the Deity as regards sexual dif-

ferences—an intention which can be distinctly compre hended only by throwing the exterior (more sensitive) portions of the mental retina *casually* over the wid field of universal *analogy*—I mean to say that this *in tention* has not been sufficiently considered. Mis Fuller has erred, too, through her own excessive sub jectiveness. She judges *woman* by the heart an intellect of Miss Fuller, but there are not more tha one or two dozen Miss Fullers on the whole face o the earth. Holding these opinions in regard to "Woma in the Nineteenth Century," I still feel myself calle upon to disavow the silly, condemnatory criticism o the work which appeared in one of the earlier number of "The Broadway Journal." That article was *no* written by myself, and *was* written by my associate Mr. Briggs.

The most favorable estimate of Miss Fuller's geniu (for high genius she unquestionably possesses) is t be obtained, perhaps, from her contributions to "Th Dial," and from her "Summer on the Lakes." Man of the *descriptions* in this volume are unrivalled fo *graphicality,* (why is there not such a word?) for th force with which they convey the true by the nove or unexpected, by the introduction of touches whic other artists would be sure to omit as irrelevant to th subject. This faculty, too, springs from her subjec tiveness, which leads her to paint a scene less by it features than by its effects.

Here, for example, is a portion of her account o Niagara:—

> Daily these proportions widened and towered more an more upon my sight, and I got at last a proper foregroun

for these sublime distances. Before coming away, I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene. After awhile *it so drew me into itself as to inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence.* The perpetual trampling of the waters seized my senses. *I felt that no other sound, however near, could be heard, and would start and look behind me for a foe.* I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil. For continually upon my mind came, unsought and unwelcome, *images, such as had never haunted it before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks.* Again and again this illusion recurred, and even *after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me. What* I liked best was to sit on Table Rock close to the great fall; *there all power of observing details, all separate consciousness was quite lost.*

The truthfulness of the passages italicized will be felt by all, the feelings described are, perhaps, experienced by every (imaginative) person who visits the fall; but most persons, through predominant subjectiveness. She judges *woman* by the heart and or, at best, would never think of employing them in an attempt to convey to others an impression of the scene. Hence so many desperate failures to convey it on the part of ordinary tourists. Mr. William W. Lord, to be sure, in his poem "Niagara," is sufficiently objective; he describes not the fall, but very properly the effect of the fall upon *him.* He says that it made him think of his *own* greatness, of his *own* superiority, and so forth, and so forth; and it is only when we come to think that the thought of Mr. Lord's greatness is quite idiosyncratic, confined exclusively to Mr. Lord, that

we are in condition to understand how, in despite o his objectiveness, he has failed to convey an idea o anything beyond one Mr. William W. Lord.

From the essay entitled "Philip Van Artevelde," copy a paragraph which will serve at once to exemplif Miss Fuller's more earnest (declamatory) style, an to show the tenor of her prospective speculations:—

> At Chicago I read again "Philip Van Artevelde," and certai passages in it will always be in my mind associated with th deep sound of the lake, as heard in the night. I used t read a short time at night, and then open the blind to loo out. The moon would be full upon the lake, and the calr breath, pure light, and the deep voice, harmonized well wit the thought of the Flemish hero. When will this country hav such a man? It is what she needs—no thin Idealist, no coars Realist, but a man whose eye reads the heavens while hi feet step firmly on the ground, and his hands are strong an dexterous in the use of human instruments. A man, religiou virtuous, and—sagacious; a man of universal sympathies, bu self-possessed; a man who knows the region of emotio though he is not its slave; a man to whom this world i no mere spectacle or fleeting shadow, but a great, solem game, to be played with good heed, for its stakes are o eternal value, yet who, if his own play be true, heeds no what he loses by the falsehood of others. A man who live from the past, yet knows that its honey can but moderatel avail him; whose comprehensive eye scans the present, neithe infatuated by its golden lures nor chilled by its many ventures who possesses prescience, as the wise man must, but not s far as to be driven mad to-day by the gift which discern to-morrow. When there is such a man for America, th thought which urges her on will be expressed.

From what I have quoted a *general* conception o the prose style of the authoress may be gathered. He manner, however, is infinitely varied. It is alway

orcible—but I am not sure that it is always anything lse, unless I say picturesque. It rather indicates than vinces scholarship. Perhaps only the scholastic, or, nore properly, those accustomed to look narrowly at ne structure of phrases, would be willing to acquit her f ignorance of grammar—would be willing to attribute er slovenliness to disregard of the shell in anxiety or the kernel; or to waywardness, or to affectation, r to blind reverence for Carlyle—would be able to etect, in her strange and continual inaccuracies, a apacity for the accurate.

"I cannot sympathize with such an apprehension; the spec-icle is *capable to* swallow *up* all such objects."

"It is fearful, too, to know, as you look, that whatever as been swallowed by the cataract, is *like* to rise suddenly light."

"I took our *mutual* friends to see her."

"It was always obvious that they had nothing in common *etween them.*"

"The Indian cannot be looked at truly *except* by a poetic ye."

"McKenney's Tour to the Lakes gives some facts not to e met *with* elsewhere."

"There is that mixture of culture and rudeness in the spect of things *as* gives a feeling of freedom," etc., etc., etc.

These are merely a few, a very few instances, taken random from among a multitude of *wilful* murders ommitted by Miss Fuller on the American of Presdent Polk. She uses, too, the word "ignore," a ulgarity adopted only of late days (and to no good urpose, since there is no necessity for it) from the arbarisms of the law, and makes no scruple of giving ne Yankee interpretation to the verbs "witness" and

"realize," to say nothing of "use," as in the sentenc "I used to read a short time at night." It will not d to say, in defence of such words, that in such sense they may be found in certain dictionaries—in that c Bolles', for instance;—*some* kind of "authority" ma be found for *any* kind of vulgarity under the sun.

In spite of these things, however, and of her fre quent unjustifiable Carlyleisms, (such as that of wri ing sentences which are no sentences, since, to b parsed, reference must be had to sentences preceding, the style of Miss Fuller is one of the very best wit which I am acquainted. In general effect, I know n style which surpasses it. It is singularly piquan vivid, terse, bold, luminous—leaving details out c sight, it is everything that a style need be.

I believe that Miss Fuller has written much poetr although she has published little. That little is tainte with the affectation of the *transcendentalists,* (I use this term, of course, in the sense which the public c late days seems resolved to give it,) but is brimfu of the poetic *sentiment.* Here, for example, is som thing in Coleridge's manner, of which the author c "Genevieve" might have had no reason to b ashamed:—

A maiden sat beneath a tree;
Tear-bedewed her pale cheeks be,
And she sighed heavily.

From forth the wood into the *light*
A hunter strides with carol *light,*
And a glance so bold and bright.

He careless stopped and eyed the maid:
"Why weepest thou?" he gently said;
"I love thee well, be not afraid."

He takes her hand and leads her on—
She should have waited there alone,
For he was not her chosen one.

He *leans* her head upon his breast—
She knew 'twas not her home of rest,
But, ah, she had been sore distrest.

The sacred stars looked sadly down;
The parting moon appeared to frown,
To see thus dimmed the diamond crown.

Then from the thicket starts a deer—
The huntsman, seizing *on* his spear
Cries, "Maiden, wait thou for me here."

She sees him vanish into night—
She starts from sleep in deep affright,
For it was not her own true knight.

Though but in dream Gunhilda failed—
Though but a fancied ill assailed—
Though she but fancied fault bewailed—

Yet thought of day makes dream of night;
She is not worthy of the knight;
The inmost altar burns not bright.

If loneliness thou canst not bear—
Cannot the dragon's venom dare—
Of the pure meed thou shouldst despair.

Now sadder that lone maiden sighs;
Far bitterer tears profane her eyes;
Crushed in the dust her heart's flower lies.

To show the evident carelessness with which this poem was constructed, I have italicized an identical rhyme (of about the same force in versification as an identical proposition in logic) and two grammatical improprieties. *To lean* is a neuter verb, and "seizing *on*" is not properly to be called a pleonasm, merely because it is—nothing at all. The concluding line is difficult of pronunciation through excess of consonants. I should have preferred, indeed, the antepenultimate tristich as the *finale* of the poem.

The supposition that the book of an author is a thing apart from the author's self, is, I think, ill-founded. The soul is a cipher, in the sense of a cryptograph; and the shorter a cryptograph is, the more difficulty there is in its comprehension—at a certain point of brevity it would bid defiance to an army of Champollions. And thus he who has written very little, may in that little either conceal his spirit or convey quite an erroneous idea of it—of his acquirements, talents, temper, manner, tenor and depth (or shallowness) of thought—in a word, of his character, of himself. But this is impossible with him who has written much. Of such a person we get, from his books, not merely a just, but the most just representation. Bulwer, the individual, personal man, in a green velvet waistcoat and amber gloves, is not by any means the veritable Sir Edward Lytton, who is discoverable only in "Ernest Maltravers," where his soul is deliberately and nakedly set forth. And who would ever know Dickens by looking at him or talking with him, or doing anything with him except reading his "Curiosity Shop"? What poet, in especial, but must feel at least

the better portion of himself more fairly represented in even his commonest sonnet, (earnestly written,) than in his most elaborate or most intimate personalities?

I put all this as a general proposition, to which Miss Fuller affords a marked exception—to this extent, that her personal character and her printed book are merely one and the same thing. We get access to her soul *as* directly from the one as from the other—no *more* readily from this than from that—easily from either. Her acts are bookish, and her books are less thoughts than acts. Her literary and her conversational manner are identical. Here is a passage from her "Summer on the Lakes":—

> The rapids enchanted me far beyond what I expected; they are so swift that they cease to *seem* so—you can think only of their beauty. The fountain beyond the Moss islands I discovered for myself, and thought it for some time an *accidental* beauty which it would not do to *leave,* lest I might never see it again. After I found it *permanent,* I returned many times to watch the play of its crest. In the little waterfall beyond, Nature seems, as she often does, to have made a *study* for some larger design. She delights in this—a sketch within a sketch—a dream within *a dream.* Wherever we see it, the lines of the great buttress in the fragment of stone, the hues of the waterfall, copied in the flowers that *star* its bordering mosses, we are *delighted;* for all the lineaments become *fluent,* and we mould the scene in congenial thought with its *genius.*

Now all this is precisely as Miss Fuller would *speak* it. She is perpetually saying just such things in just such words. To get the *conversational* woman in the mind's eye, all that is needed is to imagine her recit-

ing the paragraph just quoted: but first let us have the *personal* woman. She is of the medium height; nothing remarkable about the figure; a profusion of lustrous light hair; eyes a bluish gray, full of fire; capacious forehead; the mouth when in repose indicates profound sensibility, capacity for affection, for love—when moved by a slight smile, it becomes even beautiful in the intensity of this expression; but the upper lip, as if impelled by the action of involuntary muscles habitually uplifts itself, conveying the impression of a sneer. Imagine, now, a person of this description looking you at one moment earnestly in the face, at the next seeming to look only within her own spirit or at the wall; moving nervously every now and then in her chair; speaking in a high key, but musically, deliberately (not hurriedly or loudly,) with a delicious distinctness of enunciation—speaking, I say, the paragraph in question, and emphasizing the words which I have italicized not by impulsion of the breath, (as is usual,) but by drawing them out as long as possible, nearly closing her eyes the while—imagine all this, and we have both the woman and the authoress before us.

1846

MARGINALIA

NATIONALITY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Much has been said, of late, about the necessity of maintaining a proper *nationality* in American Letters; but what this nationality *is,* or what is to be gained by it, has never been distinctly understood. That an American should confine himself to American themes, or even prefer them, is rather a political than a literary idea—and at best is a questionable point. We would do well to bear in mind that "distance lends enchantment to the view." *Ceteris paribus,* a foreign theme is, in a strictly literary sense, to be preferred. After all, the world at large is the only legitimate stage for the autorial *histrio.*

But of the need of *that* nationality which defends our own literature, sustains our own men of letters, upholds our own dignity, and depends upon our own resources, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt. Yet here is the very point at which we are most supine. We complain of our want of an International Copyright, on the ground that this want justifies our publishers in inundating us with British opinion in British books; and yet when these very publishers at their own obvious risk, and even obvious loss, do publish an American book, we turn up our noses at it with supreme contempt (this is a general thing) until

it (the American book) has been dubbed "readable" by some illiterate Cockney critic. Is it too much to say that, with us, the opinion of Washington Irving—of Prescott—of Bryant—is a mere nullity in comparison with that of any anonymous sub-sub-editor of the Spectator, the Athenæum, or the "London Punch"? It is *not* saying too much, to say this. It is a solemn—an absolutely awful act. Every publisher in the country will admit it to be a fact. There is not a more disgusting spectacle under the sun than our subserviency to British criticism. It is disgusting, first, because it is truckling, servile, pusillanimous—secondly, because of its gross irrationality. We *know* the British to bear us little but ill will—we know that, in no case, do they utter unbiased opinions of American books—we know that in the few instances in which our writers have been treated with common decency in England, these writers have either openly paid homage to English institutions, or have had lurking at the bottom of their hearts a secret principle at war with Democracy:—we *know* all this, and yet, day after day, submit our necks to the degrading yoke of the crudest opinion that emanates from the fatherland. Now if we *must* have nationality, let it be a nationality that will throw off this yoke.

The chief of the rhapsodists who have ridden us to death like the Old Man of the Mountain, is the ignorant and egotistical Wilson. We use the term rhapsodist with perfect deliberation; for, Macaulay, and Dilke, and one or two others excepted, there is not in Great Britain a critic who can be fairly considered worthy the name. The Germans, and even the French, are

infinitely superior. As regards Wilson, no man ever penned worse criticism or better rhodomontade. That he is "egotistical" his works show to all men, running as they read. That he is "ignorant" let his absurd and continuous schoolboy blunders about Homer bear witness. Not long ago we ourselves pointed out a series of similar inanities in his review of Miss Barrett's poems—a series, we say, of gross blunders, arising from sheer ignorance—and we defy him or any one to answer a single syllable of what we then advanced.

And yet this is the man whose simple *dictum* (to our shame be it spoken) has the power to make or to mar any American reputation! In the last number of Blackwood, he has a continuation of the dull "Specimens of the British Critics," and makes occasion wantonly to insult one of the noblest of our poets, Mr. Lowell. The point of the whole attack consists in the use of slang epithets and phrases of the most ineffably vulgar description. "Squabashes" is a pet term. "Faugh!" is another. "We are Scotsmen to *the spine!*" says Sawney—as if the thing were not more than self-evident. Mr. Lowell is called "a magpie," an "ape," a "Yankee cockney," and his name is intentionally miswritten *John* Russell Lowell. Now were these indecencies perpetrated by an American critic, that critic would be sent to Coventry by the whole press of the country, but since it is Wilson who insults, we, as in duty bound, not only submit to the insult, but echo it, as an excellent jest, throughout the length and breadth of the land. *Quamdiu Catilina?* [How long, O Cataline?] We do indeed demand the nationality of self-respect. In Letters as in Govern-

ment we require a Declaration of Independence. A better thing still would be a Declaration of War—and that war should be carried forthwith "into Africa."

MAGAZINE LITERATURE OF AMERICA

Whatever may be the merits or demerits, generally, of the Magazine Literature of America there can be no question as to its extent or influence. The Topic—Magazine Literature—is therefore an important one. In a few years its importance will be found to have increased in geometrical ratio. The whole tendency of the age is Magazine-ward. The Quarterly Reviews have *never* been popular. Not only are they too stilted (by way of keeping up a due dignity,) but they make a point, with the same end in view, of discussing only topics which are *caviare* to the many, and which, for the most part, have only a conventional interest even with the few. Their issues, also, are at too long intervals, their subjects get cold before being served up. In a word, their ponderosity is quite out of keeping with the *rush* of the age. We now demand the light artillery of the intellect: we need the curt, the condensed, the pointed, the readily diffused—in place of the verbose, the detailed, the voluminous, the inaccessible. On the other hand, the lightness of the artillery should not degenerate into popgunnery—by which term we may designate the character of the greater portion of the newspaper press—their sole legitimate object being the discussion of ephemeral matters in a

ephemeral manner. Whatever talent may be brought to bear upon our daily journals, (and in many cases this talent is very great,) still the imperative necessity of catching, *currente calamo,* each topic as it flits before the eye of the public, must of course materially narrow the limits of their power. The bulk and the period of issue of the monthly magazines seem to be precisely adapted, if not to all the literary wants of the day, at least to the largest and most imperative, as well as the most consequential portion of them.

1846

MR. EMERSON AND CARLYLE

When I consider the true talent—the real force of Mr. Emerson, I am lost in amazement at finding in him little more than a respectful imitation of Carlyle. Is it possible that Mr. E. has ever seen a copy of Seneca? Scarcely—or he would long ago have abandoned his model in utter confusion at the parallel between his own worship of the author of "Sartor Resartus" and the aping of Sallust by Aruntius, as described in the 114th Epistle. In the writer of the "History of the Punic Wars" Emerson is portrayed to the life. The parallel is close; for not only is the imitation of the same character, but the things imitated are identical.

Undoubtedly it is to be said of Sallust, far more plausibly than of Carlyle, that his obscurity, his unusuality of expression, and his Laconism (which had the effect of diffuseness, since the time gained in the mere perusal of his pithinesses is trebly lost in the necessity of cogitating them out)—it may be said of

Sallust, more truly than of Carlyle, that these qualiti bore the impress of his genius, and were but a porti of his unaffected thought.

If there is any difference between Aruntius ar Emerson, this difference is clearly in favor of th former, who was in some measure excusable, on th ground that he was as great a fool as the latter *is no*

THE EFFECT OF RHYME

The effect derivable from well-managed rhyme very imperfectly understood. Conventionally "rhym implies merely close similarity of sound at the en of verse, and it is really curious to observe how lo mankind have been content with their limitation of th idea. What, in rhyme, first and principally pleas may be referred to the human sense or appreciation *equality*—the common element, as might be easi shown, of all the gratification we derive from music its most extended sense—very especially in its modific tions of metre and rhythm. We see, for example, crystal, and are immediately interested by the equali between the sides and angles of one of its faces—bu on bringing to view a second face, in all respects simil to the first, our pleasure seems to be *squared*—on brin ing to view a third, it appears to be *cubed*, and so o I have no doubt, indeed, that the delight experience if measurable, would be found to have exact math matical relations, such, or nearly such, as I suggest that is to say, as far as a certain point, beyond whi there would be a decrease, in similar relations. No

ıere, as the ultimate result of analysis, we reach the ense of mere *equality,* or rather the human delight n this sense; and it was an instinct, rather than a clear omprehension of this delight as a principle, which, in he first instance, led the poet to attempt an increase f the effect arising from the mere similarity (that is o say equality) between two sounds—led him, I say, o attempt increasing this effect by making a secondary qualization, in placing the rhymes at equal distances—hat is, at the ends of lines of equal length. In this ıanner, rhyme and the termination of the line grew onnected in men's thoughts—grew into a conventional-sm—the principle being lost sight of altogether. And : was simply because Pindaric verses had, before this poch, existed—*i. e.,* verses of unequal length—that hymes were subsequently found at unequal distances. t was for this reason solely, I say—for none more rofound—rhyme had come to be regarded as of right ppertaining to the *end* of verse—and here we com-lain that the matter has finally rested.

But it is clear that there was much more to be onsidered. So far, the sense of *equality* alone, en-ered the effect; or, if this equality was slightly varied, was varied only through an accident—the accident f the existence of Pindaric metres. It will be seen ıat the rhymes were always *anticipated.* The eye, atching the end of a verse, whether long or short, xpected, for the ear, a rhyme. The great element of nexpectedness was not dreamed of—that is to say, f novelty—of originality. "But," says Lord Bacon, ıow justly!) "there is no exquisite beauty without ome *strangeness* in the proportions." Take away this

element of strangeness—of unexpectedness—of novelt
—of originality—call it what we will—and all that
ethereal in loveliness is lost at once. We lose—w
miss the *unknown*—the vague—the uncomprehende
because offered before we have time to examine an
comprehend. We lose, in short, all that assimilates th
beauty of earth with what we dream of the beauty o
Heaven.

Perfection of rhyme is attainable only in the com
bination of the two elements, Equality and Unexpecte
ness. But as evil cannot exist without good, so un
expectedness must arise from expectedness. We c
not contend for mere *arbitrariness* of rhyme. In th
first place, we must have equi-distant or regularly re
curring rhymes, to form the basis, expectedness, o
of which arises the element, unexpectedness, by th
introduction of rhymes, not arbitrarily, but with an ey
to the greatest amount of unexpectedness. We shou
not introduce them, for example, at such points th
the entire line is a multiple of the syllables precedin
the points. When, for instance, I write—

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtai

I produce more, to be sure, but not remarkably mo
than the ordinary effect of rhymes regularly recurrin
at the ends of lines; for the number of syllables in th
whole verse is merely a multiple of the number o
syllables preceding the rhyme introduced at the middl
and there is still left, therefore, a certain degree o
expectedness. What there is of the element, unex
pectedness, is addressed, in fact, to the eye only—fo
the ear divides the verse into two ordinary lines, thu

And the silken, sad, uncertain
Rustling of each purple curtain.

I obtain, however, the whole effect of unexpectedness, when I write—

Thrilled me, *filled* me with fantastic terrors never felt before.

N. B. It is very commonly supposed that rhyme, as it now ordinarily exists, is of modern invention—but see the "Clouds" of Aristophanes. Hebrew verse, however, did *not* include it—the terminations, of the lines, where most distinct, never showing anything of the kind.

1846

SHELLEY AND TENNYSON

If ever mortal "wreaked his thoughts upon expression," it was *Shelley*. If ever poet sang—as a bird sings—earnestly—impulsively—with utter abandonment—to himself solely—and for the mere joy of his own song—that poet was the author of "The Sensitive Plant." Of art—beyond that which is instinctive with genius—he either had little or disdained all. He *really* disdained that Rule which is an emanation from Law, because his own soul was Law in itself. His rhapsodies are but the rough notes—the stenographic memoranda of poems—memoranda which, because they were all-sufficient for his own intelligence, he cared not to be at the trouble of writing out in full for mankind. In all his works we find no conception thoroughly wrought.

For this reason he is the most fatiguing of poets Yet he wearies in saying too little rather than too much What in him seems the diffuseness of one idea, is th conglomerate concision of many: and this species o concision it is, which renders him obscure. With such a person, to imitate was out of the question. It would have served no purpose; for he spoke to his own spiri alone, which would have comprehended no alien tongue. Thus he was profoundly original. His quaint ness arose from intuitive perception of that truth t which Bacon alone has given distinct utterance:— "There is no exquisite Beauty which has not som strangeness in its proportions." But whether obscure original, or quaint, Shelley had no *affectations*. H was at all times sincere.

From his *ruins,* there sprang into existence, affront ing the heavens, a tottering and fantastic *pagoda,* i which the salient angles, tipped with mad janglin bells, were the idiosyncratic *faults* of the original— faults which cannot be considered such in view of hi purposes, but which are monstrous when we regar his works as addressed to mankind. A "school" aros —if that absurd term must still be employed— school—a system of *rules* upon the basis of the Shelle who had none. Young men innumerable, dazzled wit the glare and bewildered by the *bizarrerie* of the ligh ning that flickered through the clouds of "Alastor" ha no trouble whatever in heaping up imitative vapor but, for the lightning, were forced to be content wit its *spectrum,* in which the *bizarrerie* appeared withou the fire. Nor were mature minds unimpressed by th contemplation of a greater and more mature; and thu

adually, into this school of all Lawlessness—of ob-
urity, quaintness and exaggeration—were interwoven
e out-of-place didacticism of Wordsworth, and the
ore anomalous metaphysicianism of Coleridge. Mat-
rs were now fast verging to their worst; and at
ngth, in *Tennyson* poetic inconsistency attained its
ttreme. But it was precisely this extreme (for the
eatest truth and the greatest error are scarcely two
ints in a circle) which, following the law of all ex-
emes, wrought in him (Tennyson) a natural and
evitable revulsion; leading him first to contemn, and
condly to investigate, his early manner, and finally
winnow, from its magnificent elements, the truest and
rest of all poetical styles. But not even yet is the
ocess complete; and for this reason in part, but chiefly
account of the mere fortuitousness of that mental
d moral combination which shall unite in one per-
n (if *ever* it shall) the Shelleyan *abandon* and the
ennysonian poetic sense, with the most profound Art
ased both in Instinct and *Analysis*) and the sternest
ill properly to blend and rigorously to control all—
iefly, I say, because such combination of seeming
tagonisms will be only a "happy chance"—the world
s never yet seen the noblest poem which, possibly,
n be composed.

1849

TENNYSON'S MUSIC

I am not sure that Tennyson is not the greatest of
ets. The uncertainty attending the public concep-

tion of the term "poet" alone prevents me from dem strating that he *is*. Other bards produce effects wh are, now and then, otherwise produced than by w we call poems; but Tennyson an effect which onl poem does. His alone are idiosyncratic poems. the enjoyment or non-enjoyment of the "Mo D'Arthur," or of the "Ænone," I would test any on ideal sense.

There are passages in his works which rivet a c viction I had long entertained, that the *indefinite* is element in the true ποίησις [work of poetry]. Why some persons fatigue themselves in attempts to t ravel such fantasy-pieces as the "Lady of Shalot As well unweave the *"ventum textilem"* [fabric the winds]. If the author did not deliberately prop himself a suggestive indefinitiveness of meaning, w the view of bringing about a definitiveness of vague a therefore of spiritual *effect*—this, at least, arose fr the silent analytical promptings of that poetic gen which, in its supreme development, embodies all ord of intellectual capacity.

I *know* that indefinitiveness is an element of the t music—I mean of the true musical expression. G to it any undue decision—imbue it with any very de minate tone—and you deprive it, at once, of its ether its ideal, its intrinsic and essential character. You c pel its luxury of dream. You dissolve the atmosph of the mystic upon which it floats. You exhaust it its breath of fäery. It now becomes a tangible a easily appreciable idea—a thing of the earth, eart It has not, indeed, lost its power to please, but all wh I consider the distinctiveness of that power. And

ıe uncultivated talent, or to the unimaginative appre-
ension, this deprivation of its most delicate grace will
e, not unfrequently, a recommendation. A deter-
ıinateness of expression is sought—and often by com-
osers who should know better—is sought as a beauty
ıther than rejected as a blemish. Thus we have, even
rom high authorities, attempts at absolute *imitation*
ı music. Who can forget the silliness of the "Battle
f Prague"? What man of taste but must laugh at
ıe interminable drums, trumpets, blunderbusses, and
ıunder? *"Vocal* music," says L'Abbate Gravina, who
ould have said the same thing of instrumental, "ought
) imitate the natural language of the human feelings
ıd passions, rather than the warbling o[f] Canary birds,
hich our singers, now-a-days, affect so vastly to
ıimic with their quaverings and boasted cadences."
his is true only so far as the "rather" is concerned.
f any music must imitate anything, it were assuredly
etter to limit the imitation as Gravina suggests.

Tennyson's shorter pieces abound in minute rhyth-
ical lapses sufficient to assure me that—in common
ith all poets living or dead—he has neglected to make
recise investigation of the principles of metre; but, on
ıe other hand, so perfect is his rhythmical instinct in
eneral, that, like the present Viscount Canterbury, he
eems *to see with his ear.*

1844

LETTER TO MR. —— ——

West Point, —, 1831.

Dear B——

Believing only a portion of my former volume to b worthy a second edition,—that small portion I thoug it as well to include in the present book as to republi by itself. I have therefore herein combined "A Aaraaf" and "Tamerlane" with other Poems hithert unprinted. Nor have I hesitated to insert from th "Minor Poems" now omitted whole lines, and eve passages, to the end that, being placed in a fairer ligh and the trash shaken from them in which they wer embedded, they may have some chance of being seen b posterity.

It has been said that a good critique on a poem ma be written by one who is no poet himself. This, ac cording to *your* idea and *mine* of poetry, I feel to b false—the less poetical the critic, the less just th critique, and the converse. On this account, and be cause there are but few B——'s in the world, I woul be as much ashamed of the world's good opinion a proud of your own. Another than yourself might her observe, "Shakespeare is in possession of the world good opinion, and yet Shakespeare is the greatest o poets. It appears then that the world judges correctl why should you be ashamed of their favorable judg ment?" The difficulty lies in the interpretation of th

word "judgment" or "opinion." The opinion is the world's, truly, but it may be called theirs as a man would call a book his, having bought it; he did not write the book, but it is his; they did not originate the opinion, but it is theirs. A fool, for example, thinks Shakespeare a great poet—yet the fool has never read Shakespeare. But the fool's neighbor, who is a step higher on the Andes of the mind, whose head (that is to say, his more exalted thought) is too far above the fool to be seen or understood, but whose feet (by which I mean his every-day actions) are sufficiently near to be discerned, and by means of which that superiority is ascertained, which *but* for them would never have been discovered,—this neighbor asserts that Shakespeare is a great poet,—the fool believes him, and it is henceforward his *opinion.* This neighbor's own opinion has, in like manner, been adopted from one above *him,* and so, ascendingly, to a few gifted individuals, who kneel around the summit, beholding, face to face, the master-spirit who stands upon the pinnacle.

You are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world. I say established; for it is with literature as with law or empire—an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession. Besides, one might suppose that books, like their authors, improve by travel—their having crossed the sea is, with us, so great a distinction. Our antiquaries abandon time for distance; our very fops glance from the binding to the bottom of the title page, where the mystic characters which spell

London, Paris, or Genoa, are precisely so many letter of recommendation.

I mentioned just now a vulgar error as regard criticism. I think the notion that no poet can form a correct estimate of his own writings is another. remarked before, that in proportion to the poetic talent, would be the justice of a critique upon poetry Therefore, a bad poet would, I grant, make a fals critique, and his self-love would infallibly bias h little judgment in his favor; but a poet, who is indee a poet, could not, I think, fail of making a jus critique. Whatever should be deducted on the scor of self-love, might be replaced on account of his i timate acquaintance with the subject; in short, we hav more instances of false criticism than of just, when one's own writings are the test, simply because w have more bad poets than good. There are of cours many objections to what I say: Milton is a grea example of the contrary; but his opinion with respe to the "Paradise Regained" is by no means fairl ascertained. By what trivial circumstances men ar often led to assert what they do not really believe Perhaps an inadvertent word has descended to po terity. But, in fact, the "Paradise Regained" is littl if at all, inferior to the "Paradise Lost," and is on supposed so to be, because men do not like epics, wha ever they may say to the contrary, and reading tho of Milton in their natural order, are too much weari with the first to derive any pleasure from the secon

I dare say Milton preferred "Comus" to either— so—justly.

As I am speaking of poetry, it will not be amiss

ouch slightly upon the most singular heresy in its nodern history—the heresy of what is called, very polishly, the Lake School. Some years ago I might ave been induced, by an occasion like the present, to ttempt a formal refutation of their doctrine; at present would be a work of supererogation. The wise must ow to the wisdom of such men as Coleridge and outhey, but being wise, have laughed at poetical neories so prosaically exemplified.

Aristotle, with singular assurance, has declared oetry the most philosophical of all writings; but it equired a Wordsworth to pronounce it the most netaphysical. He seems to think that the end of poetry , or should be, instruction—yet it is a truism that the nd of our existence is happiness; if so, the end of very separate part of our existence—everything con-ected with our existence should be still happiness. herefore the end of instruction should be happiness; nd happiness is another name for pleasure;—there-ore the end of instruction should be pleasure: yet we ee the above-mentioned opinion implies precisely the everse.

To proceed: *ceteris paribus,* he who pleases is of nore importance to his fellow-men than he who in-ructs, since utility is happiness, and pleasure is the nd already obtained which instruction is merely the eans of obtaining.

I see no reason, then, why our metaphysical poets nould plume themselves so much on the utility of heir works, unless indeed they refer to instruction ith eternity in view; in which case, sincere respect or their piety would not allow me to express my con-

tempt for their judgment; contempt which it would h difficult to conceal, since their writings are professedl to be understood by the few, and it is the many wh stand in need of salvation. In such case I should n doubt be tempted to think of the devil in "Melmouth, who labors indefatigably through three octavo volume to accomplish the destruction of one or two soul while any common devil would have demolished one c two thousand.

Against the subtleties which would make poetry study—not a passion—it becomes the metaphysicia to reason—but the poet to protest. Yet Wordswort and Coleridge are men in years; the one imbued in co templation from his childhood, the other a giant i intellect and learning. The diffidence, then, with whi I venture to dispute their authority, would be ove whelming, did I not feel, from the bottom of my hear that learning has little to do with the imagination— intellect with the passions—or age with poetry.

> Trifles, like straws, upon the surface flow,
> He who would search for pearls must dive below,

are lines which have done much mischief. As regard the greater truths, men oftener err by seeking them a the bottom than at the top; the depth lies in the hug abysses where wisdom is sought—not in the palpab palaces where she is found. The ancients were n always right in hiding the goddess in a well: witne the light which Bacon has thrown upon philosophy witness the principles of our divine faith—that mor mechanism by which the simplicity of a child may ove balance the wisdom of a man. Poetry above all thing

is a beautiful painting whose tints to minute inspection are confusion worse confounded, but start boldly out to the cursory glance of the connoisseur.

We see an instance of Coleridge's liability to err, in his "Biographia Literaria"—professedly his literary life and opinions, but, in fact, a treatise *de omni scibili et quibusdam aliis*. He goes wrong by reason of his very profundity, and of his error we have a natural type in the contemplation of a star. He who regards it directly and intensely sees, it is true, the star, but it is the star without a ray—while he who surveys it less inquisitively is conscious of all for which the star is useful to us below—its brilliancy and its beauty.

As to Wordsworth, I have no faith in him. That he had, in youth, the feelings of a poet I believe—for there are glimpses of extreme delicacy in his writings—(and delicacy is the poet's own kindgom—his *El Dorado*) —but they have the appearance of a better day recollected; and glimpses, at best, are little evidence of present poetic fire—we know that a few straggling flowers spring up daily in the crevices of the avalanche.

He was to blame in wearing away his youth in contemplation with the end of poetizing in his manhood. With the increase of his judgment the light which should make it apparent has faded away. His judgment consequently is too correct. This may not be understood,—but the old Goths of Germany would have understood it, who used to debate matters of importance to their State twice, once when drunk, and once when sober—sober that they might not be deficient in formality—drunk lest they should be destitute of vigor.

The long wordy discussions by which he tries to reason us into admiration of his poetry, speaks very little in his favor: they are full of such assertions as this—(I have opened one of his volumes at random) "Of genius the only proof is the act of doing well what is worthy to be done, and what was never done before"—indeed! then it follows that in doing what is *un*-worthy to be done, or what *has* been done before, no genius can be evinced; yet the picking of pockets is an unworthy act, pockets have been picked time immemorial, and Barrington, the pickpocket, in point of genius, would have thought hard of a comparison with William Wordsworth, the poet.

Again—in estimating the merit of certain poems, whether they be Ossian's or M'Pherson's can surely be of little consequence, yet, in order to prove their worthlessness, Mr. W—— has expended many pages in the controversy. *Tantaene animis?* Can great minds descend to such absurdity? But worse still: that he may bear down every argument in favor of these poems, he triumphantly drags forward a passage, in his abomination of which he expects the reader to sympathize. It is the beginning of the epic poem "Temora." "The blue waves of Ullin roll in light; the green hills are covered with day; trees shake their dusky heads in the breeze." And this—this gorgeous, yet simple imagery, where all is alive and panting with immortality—this, William Wordsworth, the author of "Peter Bell," has *selected* to dignify with his imperial contempt. We shall see what better he, in his own person, has to offer. Imprimis:—

And now she's at the pony's head,
And now she's at the pony's tail,
On that side now, and now on this,
And almost stifled her with bliss—
A few sad tears does Betty shed,
She pats the pony where or when
She knows not: happy Betty Foy!
O, Johnny! never mind the Doctor!

Secondly:—

The dew was falling fast, the—stars began to blink,
I heard a voice; it said—drink, pretty creature, drink;
And, looking o'er the hedge, be—fore me I espied
A snow-white mountain lamb, with a—maiden at its side.
No other sheep were near; the lamb was all alone,
And by a slender cord was—tether'd to a stone.

Now, we have no doubt this is all true; we *will* believe it, indeed, we will, Mr. W——. Is it sympathy for the sheep you wish to excite? I love a sheep from the bottom of my heart.

But there *are* occasions, dear B——, there are occasions, when even Wordsworth is reasonable. Even Stamboul, it is said, shall have an end, and the most unlucky blunders must come to a conclusion. Here is an extract from his preface:—

Those who have been accustomed to the phraseology of modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to a conclusion (*impossible!*), will, no doubt, have to struggle with feelings of awkwardness; (ha! ha! ha!) they will look round for poetry (ha! ha! ha! ha!) and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts have been permitted to assume that title. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

Yet let not Mr. W—— despair; he has given immortality to a wagon, and the bee Sophocles has eternalized a sore toe, and dignified a tragedy with a chorus of turkeys.

Of Coleridge, I cannot speak but with reverence. His towering intellect! his gigantic power! To use an author quoted by himself, "J'ai trouvé souvent que la plupart des sectes ont raison dans une bonne partie de ce qu'elles avancent, mais non pas en ce qu'elles nient," and to employ his own language, he has imprisoned his own conceptions by the barrier he has erected against those of others. It is lamentable to think that such a mind should be buried in metaphysics, and, like the Nyctanthes, waste its perfume upon the night alone. In reading that man's poetry, I tremble, like one who stands upon a volcano, conscious, from the very darkness bursting from the crater, of the fire and the light that are weltering below.

What is Poetry?—Poetry! that Proteus-like idea, with as many appellations as the nine-titled Corcyra! "Give me," I demanded of a scholar some time ago, "give me a definition of poetry." "Très-volontiers" and he proceeded to his library, brought me a Dr. Johnson, and overwhelmed me with a definition. Shade of the immortal Shakespeare! I imagine to myself the scowl of your spiritual eye upon the profanity of that scurrilous Ursa Major. Think of poetry, dear B——, think of poetry, and then think of —Dr. Samuel Johnson! Think of all that is airy and fairylike, and then of all that is hideous and unwieldy, think of his huge bulk, the Elephant! and then—and

then think of the "Tempest"—the "Midsummer Night's Dream"—Prospero—Oberon—and Titania!

A poem in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having, for its object, an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *in*definite sensations, to which end music is an *essential,* since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definitiveness.

What was meant by the invective against him who had no music in his soul?

To sum up this long rigamarole, I have, dear B——, what you, no doubt, perceive, for the metaphysical poets, *as* poets, the most sovereign contempt. That they have followers proves nothing—

> No Indian prince has to his palace
> More followers than a thief to the gallows.

[redacted]

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Poe, Edgar Allen

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